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PICTURES
OF
T H E W O R L D.

VOL. I.

STERLING.



PICTURES
OF
THE WORLD

AT HOME AND ABROAD;

BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"TREMAINE," "DE VERE," "HUMAN LIFE,"
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.
STERLING.

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae.—HORACE.

LONDON:
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GENERAL PREFACE.

I HAVE a thousand fears for the reception of these tales. The first of them, 'Sterling,' may possibly not be disrelished by those who are interested by pictures of the mind or heart strongly affected, or struggling under any great bias or passion. There are many Sterlings in the world, and the view taken of them therefore may possibly engage attention.

I am not so sanguine as to the other two, 'Penruddock' and 'Rheindorf,' although the former pretends, *mirabile dictu*, to something like a romantic, as well as a didactic character.

It is, however, about 'Rheindorf' that I am most fearful, for I am quite alive to the danger of founding a long discussion of political ethics (particularly as demonstrated by the French Revolution), upon a tale of fiction. The events, also, of that revolution have so often been spread in detail before the world, in all its thousand shapes—so often been examined, questioned, and quoted, as it served to illustrate particular lines of argument, that its very name may probably fill men with affright, and deter them from even approaching the subject.

Great part, therefore, of the discussions must necessarily appear dry, even in these days of political contest; and, by those who seek only amusement, will probably be left unread. And yet, if the object of this sort of writing is to instruct as well as amuse; if, in the language of the author's motto,

"Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetæ,"

those to whom political questions are of interest; who have imbibed strong governing principles of

public conduct founded upon facts, or notions of the character of certain events, and certain actors in history, which may be contested, according to the views taken of them by different parties, such persons may excuse a little labour for the sake of the object, and if they begin to read, may perhaps read on. Doctrines of importance to the well-being of states, and the conduct of statesmen, will not surely be less attracting because conveyed by supposed speaking characters under a dramatic form, than in a shape purely didactic; possibly (though that must depend upon the execution) they may be more attracting. Religion has found favour though conveyed in dialogues of fiction; then why not political disquisition?

But even the supposed threadbare subject of the French Revolution is not so exhausted, but that lights, seemingly new, are often appearing above the horizon. How many years was Brissot thought an honest, though mistaken man, even by those who blamed him in and out of France? How many

elapsed before Dumont showed him in his true colours? How few have even now read Dumont? How fewer still are those who have reasoned upon his report of him, as Winter reasons in the following pages, in order to clear a warm young mind from an inveterate prejudice?

Should the subject, therefore, be thought not out of its place, by being engrafted on a work of imagination, it may be hoped that a comment on even so old a theme may not be without its use. Old subjects indeed, may, be made new, by the consequences deduced from them: witness the thousand able commentaries of modern times, upon questions thought to be worn out.

That I may not, however, be guilty of a sort of literary suicide, by thus before its time letting the reader into what may be thought insuperable faults, let me hope that the heavy weight of an old political discussion is not to be feared throughout the story, but that there may be parts in it which, although they may not by many be thought to

repay the labour of digesting such arguments, may both engage the fancy and touch the heart.

Much (though not quite so much) of what has been thought likely to be objected to 'Rheindorf' may, perhaps, be applicable to 'Penruddock.' The political discussions, however, as well as the political feelings come home to English bosoms. The aristocrats, as well as democrats, described in the first part, are English, the manners English, and the prejudices all English. The author has drawn largely from Shakspeare in portraying the times: but that, too, is supremely English. The discussions are lighter, and it is to be hoped, therefore, not so formidably *ethical* as in the German tale. But, in addition to this, in the second part the author (strangely for him) deviates into downright romance, in a manner which may be thought not unworthy the circulating libraries themselves; and he is not even sure, after all, that the character of a novelist (such as he is) may not be fairly fastened upon him.

Indeed, he may be suspected of as much, when, in the midst of politics, he comes to the Penruddock Narrative, as it is called. But of the romance of this, perhaps, he may not be thought absolutely guilty, when he informs the reader, that the main fact, the discovery of the lost heir, is a piece of true family history.

Here, therefore, he must be acquitted of being guilty of any thing like Imagination, and remain still what he may have been thought, a would-be philosopher, but a philosopher in disguise.

There is, as usual, a great deal of dialogue in the elucidation of particular subjects. This mode of conveying opinions has been objected to by many, who prefer a regular treatise, and yet (surely inconsistently) complain of the author for his taste for the didactic.

Of course opinions differ; for my part, even without the authority of Cicero, Hume, Hurd, Leland, Berkeley, and many others, I should prefer this mode of treating a subject, not merely as

more dramatic, and, therefore, a more interesting method, but as more convenient, and less burthensome to the attention.

In this respect I agree with a quaint old author, near two centuries ago, who, in his preface, addresses himself thus :

“ To the knowing reader, touching the method of this discourse.

“ There are various ways for the conveyance of knowledge to the understanding, and to distil it by degrees into the cells of the brain.

“ It may be done, either by a downright narrative and instructive discourse :

“ Or by Allegories, Emblems, and Parables :

“ Or by way of Dialogue, Interlocutives, and Conference.

“ The first is the easiest, and most usual way.

“ The second is the most ingenuous (ingenious) and difficult.

“ The last is the most familiar and satisfactory, when one doth not only inform, but remove and

answer all objections and quæries that may intervene all along in the pursuit of the matter.

“I proceed, therefore, with colloquy.”*

* Preface to “Sober Inspections,” 1658.

STERLING;
OR THE
KNIGHT OF ST. SWITHIN'S.

VOL. I.

B



INTRODUCTION.

— CLUB.

EVERYBODY who has lived in London, knows what an alteration for the better, in the lives of the inhabitants, (particularly if bachelors), has been made by the institution of clubs. The comforts, I may say luxuries, of good company, and elegant living, formerly confined to men of fortune, may now be enjoyed by all ; and the great variety in the conditions and manners of the different members affords a perpetual supply of food for observation, to those who have any taste or talent for observing. Hence, for such persons, there is always a stream of interest going on, and *ennui* is unknown. I say, for *such persons* ; because I would by no means insinuate that *ennui* does not exist, or even that her very throne is not sometimes established, in a club-room. The yawns I hear at this moment all about me, would convince me of it, had I any doubt.

To the observer of mankind, however, it is very different,—as the tale I am about to narrate will perhaps prove ; for it is to a club that I owe the knowledge of it, and the permission to give it to the world.

After having been three years a candidate on the books of the —— Club (so numerous were the applications for admission), my turn for the ballot came round, and I was successful. The first day I took possession of my honours, I of course peregrinated through all the commodious apartments which now, in a measure, belonged to me:—the ample dining-room ; the magnificent drawing-room ; the well-stored library ; and the better-peopled coffee-room.

I was so pleased with every thing, that I think for a month I did not fail a single day in attendance. The company were heterogeneous, but upon the whole good. There were peers, members of parliament, merchants, and men of office: forming sufficient matter of curiosity for an Addison, or a Steele, a Johnson, or a Mackenzie. I was none of these ; nevertheless, I could not help being struck with the constant sight of a person of some figure, who seemed to be almost a fixture, or at least a piece of furniture, in the mansion. In the morning he was always to be found in a

particular corner of the eating-room, at breakfast ; and at dinner in the same place.

During the day he had the library almost entirely to himself ; for he seldom visited the coffee-room ; and all the evenings he had his little table and wax candle, at the farther end of it, and in a voluptuous chair, he either read or dozed away the hours, till he retired to bed, at his lodgings close in the neighbourhood. His figure was tall, and rather fashionable ; his countenance open, but very pensive ; lines of thought, and, as it struck me, of uneasy recollections, had marked his cheek. All seemed to know him, and treated him with a sort of consideration due to his age, which was between sixty and seventy. This he received with politeness, but seemingly with no wish to enter into conversation with any but two or three old-fashioned peers, who sometimes, not always, took their parliamentary dinners at the club, in their way to the House of Lords. With one of these, Lord Langston, he seemed intimate, and talked to him with animation : but this always subsided, and left him in his usual abstracted state, as soon as they separated.

I soon found out that the gentleman who had so attracted my notice was a Mr. Sterling, son

of a former Sir Robert Sterling ; but nobody could give me any accurate account of him, except that he had been a daily visitor of the club, ever since it was first founded.

As I was, however, acquainted with Lord Langston, and had now observed this friend of his for three months, I requested to be introduced to him.

"I will introduce you," said Lord Langston, "if you wish it ; but I am not sure he will repay you. He is a bit of a humorist ; and though, as you see, he lives in a daily crowd, he also, as you see, wishes to be as much aloof from it as he can."

Lord Langston, however, went up to him, and saying something in a low tone, I heard him reply, "Certainly, any friend of yours." Upon this the ceremony took place, and Lord Langston going away, Mr. Sterling and I were left alone.

I found him exceedingly well bred ; rather of the old school ; and his conversation, as far as it went, was agreeable, and showed mind. It turned naturally on the club, which he said was exceedingly convenient for people of small fortune, but would be more agreeable if less heterogeneously composed. "However," said

he, "we cannot have every thing; and any where I have very few friends."

I replied, I concluded that must be his own fault; at which he looked, as I thought, not displeased, but only bowed by way of answer.

This concluded our first day's acquaintance, which was renewed the next, and the next after that, till a sort of intimacy commenced, and we even dined and took coffee together—a thing (as he told me) he had not done with any body else, since he belonged to the club. Not only this, but he allowed me to be the companion of his daily walks round Hyde Park, or Kensington Gardens, which he said he had come to consider as his own, and which supplied him with all he wanted of country; so that now he never went there, except once a-year, for a week or so, to Langston Castle, the seat of his noble and excellent old friend.

This produced a conversation upon the family, with whom I supposed he must be intimate, and I asked him if he knew Lord Langston's sisters, Lady Valentine and Lady Lovel? At this he gave a sigh, which I thought he tried to conceal, and said he had known them formerly, but he had not seen them for years. "I suppose,"

added he, "they are like the rest of us, old, changed, and worn out. But to think of their former bloom, and see their present wrinkles, would give me no pleasure."

He sighed again, and not choosing to press him impertinently, I changed the conversation.

Our walks and dinners, and sometimes the company of Lord Langston, improved our intimacy; and at last he even asked me to take my cutlet in his chambers, near Pall-mall, where he unbent still more. Here once, when I observed upon the insulated life he led, though seemingly so acquainted with the world, he said, it was very true, he was acquainted with, but not formed for it; "which," added he, with a half smile, "you will think extraordinary, in an upstart like me."

"Upstart!" cried I, with surprise; "can the son of Sir Robert Sterling, and the friend of Lord Langston, be an upstart?"

"Aye, there it is," returned he. "Our foolish titles give but false ideas of consequence, and lead to errors which I have often rued. Better for me, if my father had never been knighted, or never stirred from the muddy kennel where both he and I were born."

"You raise my curiosity greatly," said I, "but I will not be guilty of the impertinence of seeking to have it gratified."

"Why, to tell you the truth," he replied, "I have often thought my history, totally barren as it is of a single incident to make it interesting,—on the contrary, a most absolute blank of above sixty years,—might yet furnish a very useful lesson to a number of young fools in the world, whom I see running the same career as I did, to end, I dare say, in the same failures. But you are not one of these."

This, far from allaying the desire I had to know more, only increased it, and so I fairly told him.

"The story," said he, "though of nothing, is too long for mere conversation; and though I have quantities of notes, letters, and memorandums, yet are they in such confused heaps, that to digest them into an intelligible form would be beyond my own power, much more yours, even were you willing to take the trouble. And yet, as I say, the lesson it might give to many who want it, might be so useful, that I have sometimes thought of leaving it to the world when I die. It will disgrace me; but it would be the best amends I could make for

having abused so many opportunities, which I believe I may say I had, of being a very different person from what I am."

"How shall I understand this?" I asked. "Is it that you would allow me to peruse and arrange these papers if I could?"

"Even so," he rejoined; "and I should myself be curious to see what sort of a figure I make in them; though I am so little inclined to believe it can be any thing but ridiculous, that I have never had the courage hitherto to make the attempt myself."

This soon led to an understanding between us. An escrutoire was unlocked, and a white leather bag of tolerable dimensions, and crowded with documents of all sorts, was placed at my disposal; Mr. Sterling absolutely blushing as he gave them to me.

I took them home, and shut myself up for a week, with no other companions; and the following pages are the fruits. They, indeed, contain a few, a very few animadversions of my own, which I could not help adding after Mr. Sterling's decease, and he had bequeathed them to me in full possession. But not a fact is altered, nor a reflection of his suppressed; so that, whatever the picture may be, it is at least genuine.

STERLING.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EDUCATION, OF
ROBERT STERLING.

“Go, hang yourselves, all! You are idle, shallow things. I am not of your element. You shall know more hereafter.”—SHAKESPEARE’S *Twelfth Night*.

“THE people here are really very civil!” said Caroline, as her brother returned from the Chelmsford races; “we have had near a dozen visitors since you left us, and an intimation of almost as many more.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Robert Sterling. “What in the world can they see in our appearance, to bestow so much of their tediousness upon us?”

"O, it's all owing to our good father's character. But really, Robert, you take all this as if you were not obliged, or at least not pleased, by such marks of respect."

"Sir Robert, no doubt, ought—nay, I dare say he will—be much flattered," replied Robert, junior, "by such a host of natives, thronging down like savages to the beach, upon the arrival of a ship on a voyage of discovery. But pray, who are these civil people?"

"Oh, there is Mr. Williamson, the great merchant, who they say is worth a million, and lives half the year (at least his family does) in the great house upon the hill—"

"While he plods the other half," interrupted Robert, "between his dwelling-house in Bloomsbury Square (the first perch from the City) and his house of business in Mincing Lane; but of a truth, all very respectable, and not to be sneezed at."

"You are very provoking," said Caroline, "and I won't tell you any more of our good-natured neighbours."

"Yet I should like to know, if only *par curiosité*," returned Robert; "for I have no doubt my little sister will display her usual candour and discrimination in all that she will have to say of them."

“And you, my difficult brother, will of course receive it with your usual fastidiousness, because, perhaps, there are no very great people among them ; though, now I recollect, there is one : and every body says that old Lady Mountain is an excellent creature, and does a great deal of good ; and her son, Sir James——”

“Endeavours to ape his betters in St. James’s Street, and is a miserable failure,” remarked her brother.

“I have done,” said Caroline, beginning to be annoyed ; “yet there is one other, if that will be any recommendation—Sir Capel Hopkins—who married Lady Juliana Sallowfield—who *must* please you, for she was an Earl’s daughter you know——”

“And as *sallow* as her name,” replied Robert. “She was a despairing old maid, living upon her relations, or she never would have thought of him ; for though a skeleton in her person as well as her purse, she was one of the stiffest of exclusives ; and I think *he* was the son of a stock-broker, who named him Capel after Capel Court, the Stock Exchange ; upon the strength of which, he sets up for a connexion of the Essex family.”

"My dear brother, I wish you would teach me—"

"To distinguish Bristol stones from diamonds," said Sterling. "But you were made, my dear sister, for what you are: a plain, excellent, pretty, and kind-hearted creature; delightful at home, but wholly ignorant of real life abroad."

"I give up in despair," said Caroline, "and must leave you to cater acquaintance for yourself."

"Not in this second-hand pretending town," replied Robert, "that affects to call itself a watering-place, upon the strength of being a post-office station. No! if you will seek waters and bathing for health, quaff, I beseech you, a politer air than the fat Essex,—Bath, or Weymouth, or Harrowgate, where there may be some chance of meeting people distinguished for something more than mere riches, though of their own acquiring."

"And pray what are we ourselves, Robert?" asked the sensible girl, though timidly. For she loved and esteemed her brother, and did not like to hurt him, by wounding that fastidiousness which was his foible.

"Aye, there's the rub !" replied Robert ; and he left her, as was his wont when very thoughtful, to wander along the shore by himself.

Robert Sterling (for we must now describe him a little) was the son of a most respectable, because a sensible, and very honest person, whose only fault in Robert's mind was, that he was a citizen of London. He had made, indeed, what might be called a fair fortune there ; and to this Robert had no objection, other than the place where it *was* made. And yet the disposition which caused this distaste was rather unaccountable. He had been born in St. Swin's Lane, and in his infant years saw nobody but inmates of the neighbourhood of Lombard Street and Cornhill.

When a child, it was a treat to young Robert to be allowed to walk with his father to the Royal Exchange, where he saw him much respected, and heard him converse with merchants of the same rank and respectability, whose habits, ideas, and language, seemed always on a level with his own.

Nobility, titles, fashion, were never once mentioned ; nor did there seem to him a finer place of residence than Broad Street, or a more airy situation than Tower Hill.

At ten years old he was placed at a school at Hackney, where his associates were of the same class with himself, and not at all calculated to give him any higher ideas of society than that to which he had been accustomed. He, however, even then had begun to imbibe notions that there were people in the world who, at least, *thought* themselves far superior to the circle in which his family moved—superior in tone, and in what had begun to strike his young imagination with an unaccountable interest, the nondescript, and almost indescribable thing called *Fashion*.

How a child, much more one born and bred in St. Swithin's Lane, whose parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were all, with one exception, sober people, the highest of whom was an alderman, who had been a sheriff, and narrowly missed knight-hood—how he could have come by this notion, or known that there was such a place as “the other end of the town,” may seem surprising. But it came in this wise. His mother, though the daughter and sister of merchants like her husband, had a brother, who, from a school-acquaintance with a man in office, had become a courtier, as far as a very slender place in the household could entitle him to that name

He, at least on a birth-day, had a sort of

place at the levee and drawing-room ; knew the names of a number of great people, and thought the Opera Elysium, and the playhouse humdrum. As for the City, though all his relations lived there, he never would have thought of it; only, as his place scarcely paid for his hats and silk stockings, and he had very little else to live upon, to dine in St. Swithin's Lane now and then (or, indeed, as often as his brother-in-law would let him) was far from inconvenient.

Whether from his smartness of dress or of conversation,—which latter generally, if not always, turned upon Royalty, or at least upon Lords and Ladies of the Bedchamber, and Maids of Honour (I think he did not descend to the bedchamber women),—this hopeful gentleman became a great hero in the eyes of his young nephew, who was always admitted to the dessert after dinner, admired his *coiffure* and sword (for it was then the days of curls and swords), and his talk of St. James's and the boxes at the Opera, to which he had sometimes been actually admitted.

This so fixed the boy, that even in those days the notice of his other relations became insipid. He asked why the king did not come to the Exchange, where there were so many other kings;

and was always impatient to know when uncle George was to dine with them again.

This taste, which might have worn itself out for want of food, and been exchanged for something more befitting his station, had nothing intervened, was confirmed and became permanent from the mere circumstance of his having been taken by his mother, at the suggestion of his uncle, to see the company go to court on one of the birth-days.

At that time he was but twelve years old; but from that day, though by no means devoid of natural sense—nay, with a great deal of susceptibility for other and better things, and a disposition to literature, afterwards much cultivated—fine scenes and fine company became the favourite objects of his imagination. He thought uncle George the happiest of men; and the contrast between Lombard Street, with all its millions, and the gilded throng of the palace, whose poverty was at least concealed, became hateful to him to think of.

How soon, and by what trifles, may not a cast of character be thus decided! But let us do the boy justice. It was not merely this temporary single event of a sight of the court, that produced the effect we have noticed. His imagi-

nation was peculiarly warm, and his susceptibilities remarkably keen. He had the seeds of what is called a fine mind; and among other consequences, was feelingly alive, even at these years, to a jealousy, far from happy, of both persons above himself, and situations superior to his own. A slight from such persons became early a source of mortification, amounting to affliction; and to see any one so high as to be precluded from his notice or acquaintance, was a matter of serious disturbance to him. Whenever, therefore, there was a barrier to this, it was the object of his fondest ambition to break it down. On the other hand, he was particularly sensible of the impressions of real elegance, both of manners and mind, and hence was still more disposed to admire those above him; while the jealousy above-mentioned turned him with horror from the idea of courting them.

Of course, all this did not appear at the early time we have commemorated; but the seeds were there, and we shall presently see how they took root, expanded, and fructified, as his life proceeded.

Uncle George fostered all these young prejudices, in regard to fashion at least, both by pre-

cept and example ; and, having himself been educated at Westminster School, where he had played at cricket with an Earl's son, he had taken a violent repugnance to so mean a place of education for his nephew as Hackney. This, therefore, he had always opposed, as far as he dared ;—for he was somewhat in awe of his brother-in-law's plain sense—to say nothing of his dining with him once or twice a week. Out of the world, he used to say, or what was worse, in the midst of the vulgar world, there were no boys of fashion or consequence, not even of commercial consequence—for even these had now begun to soar to Westminster, if not to Eton ;—no connexions could there be formed ; nor could even very polite literature be acquired, at such a second, or third, or fourth-rate place of education.

This, however, was always said to Mrs. Sterling, not to her husband. But this was not all the reform wished for, if not suggested, by uncle George. He lodged (as he said) in Sackville Street, on the strength of a part of the house, which was in Vigo Lane, having a window looking into it. Not only this was a great distance from St. Swithin's, but St. Swithin's itself was utterly unworthy of any man who could live out of it.

The people of Piccadilly thought it was the same as Wapping. It was degrading, he said, for a man of Mr. Sterling's substance to live there.

The two changes then, of the school and the residence, were constant themes between uncle George and his sister, when Mr. Sterling was not by; and, as to the school, it was warmly seconded by young Robert himself; who, young as he was, had found out that scarcely any of his schoolfellows had seen St. James's, nor ever went to the other end of the town; and that the Hackney stages were incommodious, dirty, and vulgar. This too had been much noticed and complained of by two young gentlemen, the only persons whose family did not reside in the City, and who, being the sons of a baronet, were treated with greater consideration than the other boys, particularly by Robert Sterling.

All this was urged again and again; and Mrs. Sterling being brought to listen, the transition was not difficult to her good husband; who, though of a sufficiently decided temper in all matters that concerned himself and his business, had, even in these, consideration and affection enough for his wife sometimes to listen to her, though he never gave her a voice. But, on

the other hand, on subjects wherein she was equally concerned (as in all matters of household regulation, and the management of her children), as a just man, he not only thought he was bound to consult her, but found it convenient sometimes to yield to her sway. It is certain, he said, he had never repented it.

On her part, on the present occasion she had studied her husband enough to know, that to propose the changes meditated, as suggestions of uncle George—who was fit, in his brother-in-law's opinion, only for what he was, a gentleman usher daily waiter—would ruin the whole design. So she lay by, and approached the subject by degrees, as arising entirely out of her own observation.

Report indeed says, that the good lady herself had caught a little of her brother's fashionable propensities, and had begun to think there were politer places than St. Swithin's, for men of her husband's fortune; and though, from the time of her marriage, she had never felt, much less exhibited, any discontent at being so buried, yet now and then, when chatting with a friend whose husband had removed to Bedford Row, she would confess that buried she was. At the same

time, being of a moderate temper, and a woman who, in regard to a husband,

“ If she rules him, never shews she rules,”

she trusted to time and favourable changes to bring about her wishes.

These, in the end, were both of them gratified; for though Mr. Sterling, having been at Hackney himself, made a stout defence of it, saying it was worth all the public schools put together, and would therefore on no account listen to a proposal to send his son to Westminster; he so far yielded to his wife's wishes (especially as his fortune was growing more and more flourishing) as to consent that Robert should have a university education; and as a preparation for this, he was placed with a clergyman who took but few pupils, and those *only of the genteelest families*.

Then, as to the change of abode, having himself no objection (as he could afford it) to get into a purer air, Mrs. Sterling was gratified by a remove to Bloomsbury Square.

Mr. Barker, the tutor who took pupils from none but the genteelest families, was not quite calculated to second Mr. Sterling's views in regard to his son. From having been educated at Eton and Cambridge, he had the most sovereign

contempt for all the little academies (as they are called) that throng the suburbs of London ; and from having a sister married to a baronet, who lived in Mount Street, she was equally fastidious in regard to the City. But, as two hundred pounds a-year was not to be despised, he condescended to give his time to the preparation of young Robert for the University ; and it is only fair to both tutor and pupil to say, that the prejudices of the one wore away before the progress of the other, and, what was better, the display of many natural good qualities, which shewed themselves pleasantly, whenever not obscured by an uneasiness (the plague-spot of his mind) which arose whenever he thought of, or was thrown into company with, young men in a more brilliant situation than himself.

This spot, though not of much moment in the quiet house of a private tutor in the country, afterwards enlarged, and became of serious consequence to his happiness, when transplanted to Oxford,—where in due time he arrived, with a fair, nay, a considerable, portion of Greek and Latin, some knowledge of books, and none at all of the world.

CHAPTER II.

MISERIES OF A FRESHMAN.

“How green are you, and fresh in this old world?”

SHAKESPEARE.—*King John*.

“You all look strangely on me!”

Hen. IV., Pt. ii.

As Sir Robert Sterling's acquaintance with the world out of his own sphere was very limited, and in the literary world might be said to be none at all, in sending his son to college he had never thought of procuring for him any thing like letters of recommendation to any of the leading characters at Oxford.

He had, indeed, inquired after all the expenses necessary to establish him at one of the best colleges, and these he had provided for liberally through the Oxford Bank—the only connexion he thought necessary in the place. All the rest, he said, might be safely left to take care of itself. “If his abilities are what his tutor has always assured us they are,” said he to Lady

Sterling, "there is no doubt he will make his way."

"No doubt," echoed Lady Sterling; "but, as they say, or at least my brother George does, that there are many young men of high family and fashion at his college, it is a pity we did not think of getting him some special introduction to them."

"And from whom would you get it, my good woman?" asked Sir Robert. "If the Lord Mayor or Sheriffs could have done it, I would not have scrupled asking them."

"There's my brother George," replied Lady Sterling.

"Psha! I dare say he stands more in need of recommendations than Robert himself."

So Robert was left to his own resources, to battle it as he could against his own inexperience, and the prejudices and illiberality of others; the only letter he had taken being from his private tutor to one of the head tutors of his college, under whom he was to be entered.

It would not be easy to describe either his amazement or his sense of loneliness, when the ceremony of matriculation was over, and in the midst of a crowd he was left to himself. The venerable richness of the piles around him,

dedicated to learning, with all their associations, did not fail to interest and fix his observation ; so that the first day he seemed absolutely in a trance. But he was considerably annoyed by the manner in which he was treated by his brother gownsmen, who, seeing him a complete *fresh-man*, did not scruple to stare, to point, and, after they had passed, to giggle, so as to agitate his feelings, which were naturally sensitive, but peculiarly alive to any thing that implied disrespect.

While, however, this was confined to the lower classes of scholars, who were pacing the High Street, with little to distinguish them in their appearance, he was not much stung. But in his own quadrangle he found himself criticised by evidently higher personages—gentlemen in silk gowns and silk stockings (remember, it was a long time ago), with velvet caps on their heads, and some of them with gold tassels floating over them. These did not laugh or stare *very* rudely ; but stare they did, with searching curiosity, as if to ascertain the quality, birth, and parentage of the greenhorn, whom nobody knew.

Greenhorn he certainly was ; for thinking that all who were entered of the same college, and engaged in the same pursuits, required no sort

of introduction—nay, his very *bonhomie* itself urging him to it—he saluted two of these sprouts of fashion, as they stared at him, and actually asked them how they did. To his astonishment, their only reply was laughing with one another; and having looked around, to observe if he had any, and what friends to protect him, and finding none, they turned on their heel, with countenances denoting that he had gained little by this primitive civility.

This annoyed him severely, and not the less when, on inquiring of one of the scouts, he found that the two velvet caps who had thus slighted him were the Honourable Mr. Tylney and the Honourable Mr. Selwyn, sons of peers.

Their names and titles gave him a feeling of discontent, when he thought of his inferiority in family and station, which was perfectly ridiculous. Yet, tyro as he was, he vowed within himself that he would force these very men, before he left college, though he then knew not how, to do him the justice to which he thought he had a right, in being admitted to their society.

He was, however, doomed to still greater mortification the next day. By that time, all the little that was known about him by his tutor at Oxford, from his tutor in the country, was

spread sufficiently abroad, and he heard enough merely in passing among his fellows, though not intended for his ear, to sting his feelings almost to madness.

“Have you seen the city knight, since?” said Mr. Tylney to Mr. Selwyn, while they were walking before him, not knowing he was behind; while another gownsman asked his companion, what sort of thing was the *hackney coach* just arrived?

Though awed by the novelty of his situation, and aware that there was a conventional point of merit to which he might not come up, in the opinion of these self-sufficient and self-elected judges of propriety, he was about to show his resentment rather roughly, when the Head of the House came by.

All caps were immediately off, and all thoughts of vengeance stayed.

Doctor Gaston, the Principal, with a mixture of pomp and good-nature (for he had both), returning his salute, asked if he was not the young person who had just entered under Mr. Lambert, the principal tutor.

Replying in the affirmative, the doctor then said he would be glad to have a little conversation

with him, when he had more leisure, and bowed him away.

The startled tyro did not redeem himself with his quizzing companions by the manner in which he received this salutation of the great man. Taught by his country tutor to consider the Head of a college, particularly if he was of Eton or Westminster, as one of the greatest men upon earth, he blushed, stammered, and looked foolish, and the amusement of his tormenting observers was increased in proportion.

The worst was, he could not fasten a positive affront upon any one person ; yet he felt that he was an object of something very like ridicule, and he retired to his room in an agony of rage and indignation, which hardly ever wore out of his recollection, even long after he had quitted the character of freshman, and had taken a part in the world itself.

In truth, our friend, though a person sufficiently proud and independent, and even not unconscious of a degree of mental superiority to many who were above him in rank, added to this, the not uncommon weakness of thinking himself often undervalued, and succumbing under, instead of rising superior to, such a persuasion.

'Thus, whatever his real powers of mind, and however able to prove them when necessity called for it, it required time and goading to screw his courage to the proper point; and though panting to rise to a level with those above him in rank or reputation, he was always, when at first thrown with them, overawed, and unable to use the opportunities he had sought, from the very *mauvaise honte* that every booby felt.

Though ambitious, and, when spurred, capable of energy, young Sterling's too sensitive consciousness of inferiority, where he felt himself inferior, whatever the point of comparison, disabled him; and on those occasions no man was so little like himself, so little what he wished to be, or what indeed he might have been. Thus, before a man of high birth, and still more if of high fashion or breeding, the remembrance of St. Swithin's Lane made him absolutely quail; and if it rained on that saint's day, and any body observed upon it, he has been known to turn pale and leave the room.

In the same manner, though a very fair scholar, the consciousness of his original Cockney school, and his inactive privacy of education, afterwards made him awkward and timid,

even to unhappiness, while surrounded by the bolder fronts, and readier discipline, of the numerous public schoolmen among whom he had entered.

It is strange how long he laboured under this disadvantage of character. At college it almost weighed him down ; and even afterwards, in the world, it never wholly quitted him : for his taste and disposition were decided, and he carefully avoided all acquaintance with persons inferior, or even equal, to himself, from a fastidiousness that made him any thing but happy.

Yet his consciousness of his half-breeding, and the newness and homely manners of his family, discomfited his efforts, and rebuked his genius, whenever he found himself thrown with those he most affected, and before whom he most wished to shine.

Hence, a sort of jealousy and uneasiness, which, in his most prosperous moments in after-life, often mixed bitter alloy with what appeared, perhaps, to the world a career of happiness and success.

CHAPTER III.

A UNIVERSITY MAGNATE.

"I am one that would rather go with Sir Priest than Sir Knight."—SHAKESPEARE.—*Twelfth Night*.

SOME days after his rencontre with the Principal, our tyro felt a little alarmed on receiving a message from that great person, through his butler, an exceeding grave and stiff gentleman, that his master desired to see him without delay; and when he was about to sally forth in his cap alone, his flutter was not diminished at being told by the same important person, that no one, not even tutors, ever waited upon the Principal except in full costume of gown, cap, and band.

But, before we proceed farther, it may not be amiss to give some little account of this great University magnate, who had thus, by his message, thrown our youth into such a trepidation.

The Rev. Doctor Gaston, then, was one of the best scholars of the university. He was, in-

deed, greatly distinguished; and for that, as well as his private good qualities, greatly respected, notwithstanding some weaknesses, inseparable from our nature. But these, being not of a mischievous sort, did him little harm, when compared with his real merits. His weakness was a sort of pomp in the display of himself, even in his kindnesses; and particularly in his knowledge of the world, the government of his college, and his penetration as to the characters of the young men who had been bred under him.

A man of no birth, the greatness of Dr. Gaston began at Eton, where, as a scholar, he was much distinguished, and where, as at Oxford afterwards, he laid the foundation of an incalculable prejudice in favour of public education and literary eminence, over all other educations and eminences in life. An aristocrat as to these of the first order, though he honoured nobility, and did not despise wealth, he thought the laurels and high academical situations he had acquired (to say nothing of its comforts) the proudest place which a man could fill. It brought him, in his own mind, to a level with all but his sovereign, and raised him infinitely above the greatest riches, particularly commer-

cial riches—of which he did not pretend to conceal his contempt.

Men of family, indeed, and high political consequence, obtained from him a marked attention ; partly from his general aristocratic feelings ; not a little, from the honour he did himself in honouring them.

He was, therefore, proud to see his college well filled by promising young men ; proud of directing their studies ; proud of influencing their choice of friends ; and exceedingly proud of pointing out the lines of demarcation which they ought to draw in their intercourse with one another.

But though in this he not a little favoured that tendency to what is called exclusiveness, which is so much seen in our national character, his principal object in every rank was to inculcate integrity and honour, and promote knowledge ; and it must be owned that, wherever he saw these flourish, he gave them a very fostering care, whatever the station ; where they failed, whatever they were, he treated the parties with contemptuous neglect.

Hence, where his opinion was favourable, and his prejudices not revolted, no one knew better how to “ pour the fresh instruction o’er the

mind," or to conciliate the attachment of those who received it.

On the other hand, no one could, when he deserved it, humble another so well. But to do this, he made it a rule to acquaint himself personally—that is, to examine by conversation (which he well knew how to shape to his object)—every young person who came under his sway ; and as the result was, so he acted.

In this, notwithstanding his prejudices, he was sufficiently considerate, and often kind ; for though his high-mindedness made him little scrupulous in demolishing a proud, and even a high-born fool, real ability and modesty, whatever the condition, always claimed him as a protector.

He thus was necessarily a great searcher into the actions, conditions, and history of those he governed ; and it was extraordinary how soon, and how accurately, he obtained what he wanted to know.

In the present instance, our tyro was no sooner entered, than he had learned from his tutor all that the latter himself knew of his antecedent life, his present position, and his future destination ; and he proceeded in the appointed interview accordingly.

Upon arriving at the Principal's lodging, our freshman was shown into an ante-chamber, where several of his fellow under-graduates were waiting, some of them with fear and trembling, their turn of audience. This over, he was ushered into the august presence.

The room was well carpeted and arm-chaired, and set off by tables loaded with open folios ; the whole scene exhibiting, in its style and ornaments, a most imposing picture of ease and comfort, and knowledge and learning at the same time.

The heart of the freshman fluttered, and yet not without some disposition to criticise, or at least appreciate the mode of his reception ; in which he showed one of the peculiarities of his character, which was, that however surprised or agitated, observation, investigation, and comparison, never abandoned him.

The Principal, who was sitting, or rather lolling, on a couch of rich Turkey leather, returned his salute with a condescending nod, meant to be of protection, and bade him to be seated.

" Do not be alarmed," said he, smiling ;
" I dare say you think the Head of a house at Oxford a sort of bashaw ; but you have nothing

to fear. Yet, I believe young people who have been confined to the City, as I understand you have been, or at best brought up at a private school, or academy, as it is called—I think you were at Hackney?”

“A very long time ago, Sir,” said Robert, “when scarcely more than a child.”

“Well! that is very well; and you were afterwards, I think, placed under a very respectable person, Mr. Barker, of whom I have sometimes heard. Your Hackney master, however, I suppose, was one of the dissenting class. We know Hackney is their hot-bed, and possibly I may be speaking to one, or at least the son of one of them? They are very powerful in the City.”

The examinant here ventured an interruption, by saying, though with some hesitation, “My father, Sir, does not live in the City.”

“O! I had forgot: I believe he removed, on being knighted, to some place more west?”

“Bloomsbury Square, Sir.”

“True! true! I had indeed forgot; but he still, I believe, keeps his old counting-house in some Lane—I forget the name.”

“St. Swithin’s,” replied Robert, now blushing, and dashed down again, by perceiving that what

he had no wish to disclose, and indeed most wished to conceal, was perfectly well known.

"Well," observed the superior, encouragingly, "no harm in that; indeed, I am told that a great proportion of the City wealth is acquired in many of those lanes and close places, where the sun seldom shines. I never was in the City but once, and that was in a place called Lawrence Poultney, and up a court, where, I own, the amplitude and magnificence of the house, when in it, formed a strong contrast to the dirt and gloom of the exterior. But Oxford spoils one."

The youth bowed, and could have said he thought so too; but the principal went on inquiringly.

"Your father-is still in business?"

"Certainly."

"And your education has been somewhat neglected, and indeed I may say private, with the little exception of those Dissenters at Hackney."

The youth assented again.

"You are now, therefore, embarked on a sea to which you have not been accustomed, and perhaps may require a little pilotage."

He said this kindly, and our tyro bowed his thanks.

“ You have, I dare say,” proceeded the doctor, “ already observed, that exclusive of being a stranger, the persons with whom you are to associate, at least in study, are, or look, as if they were of a different race from that with which you have hitherto associated.”

Here observing his *protégé* to redden, he added, with some graciousness, “ Observe, I am not putting this disrespectfully to you, but the better to get at your feelings on coming, in so unprotected a manner, to a place for which you are not exactly calculated ; like all, indeed, coming from private schools, especially if of commercial families. Your father, I think, did wrong in not procuring you, as I dare say he might, introductions to somebody of weight in the college, who might rescue you from the unpleasantness which I hear you have already experienced.”

Though this was certainly meant to be condescension, we are afraid the youth did not thank the great person who uttered it. He felt his pride both hurt and roused, and not the less from feeling that what was insinuated was true. With some firmness, therefore, he replied : “ I own, Sir, as you put it to me, that I feel already as if I had been ill treated ; certainly

not treated with the good breeding I expected from *gentlemen*."

The stress he laid upon this last word moved the interest and curiosity of Doctor Gaston, who was, in fact, struck with this little indication of a spirit, which, from a person so underbred, he had perhaps not expected. It induced him even to change his tone, and he said, obligingly enough, "in regard to scholarship, I am glad to think that you have little to fear; for I am pleased to find from Mr. Lambert, that, thanks I suppose to Mr. Barker (we will say nothing of Hackney), your progress has not been inconsiderable. But, with your apparent feelings, I much fear that, as a merchant's son, you may be here exposed to some little mortifications you did not count upon; unless you can balance the advantage with some superiority of your own, of another character."

Robert Sterling bit his lip almost through and through, at this taunt, as he thought it, though it was not so meant: he felt something very like a tear scalding in his eye, and the good Principal, totally unused to this exhibition of hurt feelings, became himself a little disconcerted. He even took the young man's hand, and actually asked pardon, if he had uninten-

tionally said any thing disparaging to him. "My remark," said he, "was merely to put a young man, who I see has a great deal to learn, and has, perhaps, too much sensibility, upon his guard against what may at first annoy him, but which the good sense he seems to have will, I have no doubt, soon disarm of its power. However, I see you are a little overset, and we will quit this subject for the present. Indeed, I must shorten this interview, which has taken a turn I did not intend. We will renew it another time, for there is something in you which I like. At present, I am waited for by the Vice-Chancellor; so, adieu!"

At this he gave him two fingers; and Robert, ruffled, hurt, and even angry, yet somewhat pleased, in spite of himself, with the Principal, quitted the presence.

CHAPTER IV.

WOUNDED PRIDE.

“What has broached this tumult but thy pride?”

SHAKESPEARE.—*Henry VI.*

WITH a heart very full of what had passed, yet ashamed of having been so affected, our affronted tyro now sought to retire from the strange world he seemed to be in, in order to indulge in a self-examination which, in truth, he much needed.

Yet where to go, or what solitude to find out, safe from the gaze of the supercilious people he had quarrelled with, he could not exactly tell.

One, and one only person, not very greatly exceeding him in age, in the whole University, he happened to know. But not only their acquaintance had begun at Hackney, but his friend was also a merchant's son, who had afterwards finished at Merchant Tailor's School, and was thence, in due course, transferred to St. John's College.

Both the school and the college were exceedingly respected for their literature, but little could be said for either on the score of *fashion*. This young Sterling knew, for there had been a question raised by old Sir Robert, whether St. John's would not have been the fittest seminary for his son to enter at ; but this was vehemently opposed in secret by uncle George, and openly by Lady Sterling. This annoyed Sir Robert; but the private tutor, Mr. Barker, coming to their assistance, made so powerful a diversion in favour of Doctor Gaston, and a more extended view of the worldly advantages which his college afforded, that the good knight, *multo gemens*, was forced to succumb ; and Robert, whose heart beat high at the thought of the brilliant people with whom he was intended to associate, was placed at the college presided over by Doctor Gaston. The consequences we have seen.

Upon the whole, then, it was matter of necessity which led him to seek out his quondam friend of St. John's, whose qualifications, to judge of his position in a society of so much greater *éclat*, were at least extremely doubtful.

Nevertheless, had his humour been sufficiently serene, or his understanding less obscured by his feelings, he might have applied to a worse coun-

sellor than his friend, who was some years older in the University than himself, and had taken his degree. He also had much strong sense, and, what was a great aid to it, was little troubled with that inconvenient sensibility which had so disturbed the quiet of young Sterling.

The friends met, and Wilson, proud of his college gardens, one of the beauties of Oxford, was glad to propose a walk in them, where they might talk over their early days at Hackney, and the neighbourhood of Cornhill. To his surprise, his friend's heart did not seem to leap for joy at the mention of those halcyon days. He breathed quick, and looked gloomy, and ejaculated, with some spleen, "Hackney ! Cornhill ! for Heaven's sake do not let us think of those odious places—that vulgar school, and that kennel of a City."

"What," said Wilson, with rather a sturdy look, "are you grown fine already ? Have three days in your aristocratic college done such wonders, as to make you forget your cradle, and quarrel with your nurse ?"

"Not so," replied Sterling ; "but with due respect for the City, it seems, in the opinion of all here, fine or not fine, to cover those who belong to it with its own mud."

Wilson, who, as we have said, had a naturally strong sense belonging to him, looked his astonishment at this effusion of what seemed to him to be a palpable, though unaccountable, slander; and eyeing his old associate with some curiosity, asked what had happened that he should so abuse the place of his birth; adding, "I find no such notions here."

"I dare say not," said Robert, with a meaning emphasis, which Wilson did not, or would not, understand; and walking on with still more gloom in his features, he observed, "I almost wish I had followed your example, as my father desired; I should not then have been so unhappy."

"Are you unhappy?" asked Wilson, with kindness.

"Why yes, and ashamed that I am so; for nothing, I own, is so childish, so unworthy a man of common sense—which, however, I doubt myself to be."

"Come," said Wilson, recovering, by his sympathy for his friend, "I see there is nothing very serious to apprehend; but what's the matter?"

"Matter to rouse a less irritable disposition than mine," observed Sterling. "Nay, I ques-

tion if your Merchant Tailor equanimity, happy as it is, would bear it better."

"But the matter?" still urged Wilson.

"I am a merchant's son," said Sterling.

"Well?"

"A mere city knight!"

"Well?"

"Have been at Hackney Academy!"

"Well?"

"Well! By my faith, but it is not well. I am surrounded by public school-men—peers' sons—one a peer himself—by heirs-apparent of great 'squires; all men of fashion, and belonging to a class to which you, and I, and other miserales, may seek in vain to be admitted. Nay, I feel myself looked down upon, jeered, laughed at, despised by sons of lawyers and country clergymen, who can hardly pay their *battels*, merely because my father once lived in St. Swithin's Lane, and I was not educated at a public school."

"More fools they, for giving themselves such airs," said Wilson; "and, if I may say so, *you*, for taking it so to heart."

"You say true," replied Sterling; "but I cannot account for this usurpation of a superiority I do not own. I know not even if I am

thought to have the same flesh and blood. Yet I am as rich, and I believe as well grounded, as most of these puppies. Would only that I could make them feel it !”

At this he positively stamp'd upon the ground, and Wilson, shocked as well as surprised, and a total stranger to such feelings, could not even answer, but look'd astonishment. At last, thinking he had made a capital discovery to relieve his friend, he fairly asked why he should not leave such a foolish, fastidious college, and come and take refuge with him at St. John's ?

Sterling started, and eyed him with almost horror.

“ What ! quit the field before I am even engaged. How very little, Wilson, do you know me. If you are satisfied with a Merchant Tailor's garden and obscurity, well. I trust, and dare say, you will be happy ; but I look to a higher flight.”

“ And to be unhappy,” answered Wilson, not much pleased. “ My proposal, however, was merely to relieve you from the anxieties which you yourself seem to have created, and of which, I thank God, I have no notion.”

“ Forgive me,” cried Sterling ; “ I have behaved very ill ;” and the good-natured Wilson

heartily took the hand held out to him. "I will however stay where I am, and not, I was going to say, eat, or drink, or sleep, till I have proved to those two supercilious honourables that I am quite as good as they."

Wilson professed his ignorance of his meaning. "But if your grievance is, as I suppose," said he, "some silly airs they have given themselves, I would not add to their triumph by being silly myself."

"I will *cut* them," exclaimed Robert, with fierceness.

"My good friend," returned Wilson, drily, "you had better wait till you are acquainted with them. At present they seem to have cut you."

This did not give Mr. Sterling the consolation he had sought, and observing to his friend, "I wish I had your apathy," he took his leave, allowing he had made a great fool of himself; to which, as little offensively as he could, his friend perfectly assented.

It would be more than superfluous to relate all the corrodings of the mind of our friend (now any thing but our hero), which were produced by the mortifications he was forced to undergo; but



such are the misfortunes of false ambition. He tried to analyze his own character, with a view to cure ; but in vain. The sore rankled. He was too proud to make advances, even if he thought they would be received : but the contrary was evident, or seemed so to his jealous imagination ; and as, in his then frame of mind, the advances of men of his own calibre were poison to him, he shunned them as much as he thought himself shunned by those he wished to conciliate.

He was therefore, though in the midst of a crowd, in a fair way of being left by himself. At dinner he spoke not to his neighbours ; at lecture he was insensible to the approbation of Mr. Lambert, because it seemed not to make the least difference in the demeanour of the men of fashion who were his fellows in the class. In short, he was like Haman, whose honours availed him nothing, so long as Mordecai the Jew refused to do him reverence.

Even the public walks were hateful to him, because thronged by people whom he wished to know, but could not ; or who wished to know him, and he would not let them.

Hence his perambulations were always solitary. He rambled in the fields, or to Godstow,

alone ; and often passed a whole hour among the ruins of the latter, with no thoughts but his own with which to communicate.

Wilson had always his respect, but very little of his company. In fact, Sterling was afraid of him. For though he excelled Wilson in fineness of mind, and also in scholarship, he was far below him in practical good sense, and sturdy decision of conduct. *Risum teneatis?*—but there are such characters.

CHAPTER V.

MR. STERLING IS MORE AND MORE HUMBLER.

“Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?

SHAKESPEARE.—*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

STERLING's way of life, so different from that of most young men of his age, could not fail of being remarked. Those whose advances he had rejected, for which they did not like him the better, thought him a proud dandy, as *he* thought those who kept aloof from him. These last still deemed him a city quiz, who had no business at their college.

The college distinctions, however, which he sometimes obtained, by degrees began to change this opinion.

His themes, both Latin and English, were read, and his verses were once, even by the Etonians, pronounced not bad.

But his anxieties were not diminished; on the contrary, he was reduced to despair by a visit

from some relations—excellent people, very fond of him ; but whose new clothes, put on expressly for the occasion, though early in the morning, denoted their Cockney ideas, and who, to his everlasting dismay, before numbers of his fellow-students, told him they had been a *towering* in a *phe-aton*, and begged he would *sqwire* them to see the sights.

This was spread from one end of the college to the other. Even Doctor Gaston laughed at the cits, and the distress of our aspirant was consummate.

In this dilemma he wrote to uncle George, who advised him to persuade his father, if he could, to change his academical rank to that of a Gentleman Commoner ; a negociation which he accordingly began, through his mother ; with what success will be presently seen. Meantime he was again summoned to the presence of the Principal.

That observing personage had seen, not without interest, the struggles that were passing in his mind, and were so palpably evinced by his conduct. At first he had viewed them with not much sympathy. In fact, his own prejudices were sufficiently strong to prevent him from

being surprised at a predicament, which, though he did not encourage it, he said was only what might have been expected.

"His father," said he to Mr. Lambert, the tutor, "from the ignorance of the world which belongs to his class, made a false step, prejudicial to the lad himself. What had he to do with us, or we with him, if he is to be buried in a counting-house, as I suppose he is. However, I am glad to think he may be made a scholar, though to be thrown away."

Mr. Lambert fully assented to these sentiments, and being himself the son of a wool-comber near Windsor, hugged himself in his good fortune, that from having been on the foundation at Eton, he had not been thrown away.

Young Sterling obeyed Doctor Gaston's summons this time with less fear than the last.

"I suppose," said he to himself, "I shall be again treated with all my inferiorities. But when I inform him of my hope for a higher rank in the college, he may think differently. Yet, what a fool am I, to feel as I do ! and how do I envy Wilson for his want of ambition, and his common sense !"

With these reflections he was once more in the

presence of the magnate ; and the usual sign to be seated being given, the doctor rushed in *medias res*.

" Confess, my good young man," said he, " that you have not yet got reconciled to your lot in this strange place—as it must still appear to you. I assure you I have often directed my thoughts towards you, and should be glad to counsel you to your good."

Robert bowed low, in token of his gratitude, and listened for more before he answered.

" I wish you to confide in me," continued the Principal, " a thing which nobody, I trust, ever repented of doing."

Robert said he had every wish in the world to do so.

" Tell me, then, in the first place," pursued the doctor, " why it is you pass so much of your leisure time alone. I say leisure, because as to your studies, by which I have pleasure in thinking you profit, you cannot be too abstracted. But in your hours of relaxation, it should seem, and even at meals, I understand you act as if you were an isolated being ; and either think yourself not good enough, or too good, as the case may be, for companionship with any of the numerous members of the hall."

“How the deuce could he know this?” thought Robert; and the Principal went on.

“Is it fastidiousness that occasions this? though that can hardly be in one so little known, and educated as you have been; or is it pride (I will not say sullenness), at finding yourself not exactly upon a level with those men of rank into whose society perhaps you thought, without the smallest introduction, you were to be received with open arms? Mr. Tylney or Mr. Selwyn, for example, whom on the first day of your arrival you saluted without knowing them, nay asked them how they did, with a *bonhomme* for which, I assure you, they gave you credit.”

Robert was still more surprised at the knowledge the Principal shewed of what he said and did; but answered as he felt, though in a half murmur, half whisper, and not much liking to look up, “I saw no signs of it.”

“No!” said his chief, laughing (good-humouredly, however), “I do not suppose you did; for, to say truth, you made a mistake, and not a small, though a very venial one. For, heaven knows, I do not blame *you* in the least, but those who so rashly sent you here without friends, without experience, or any thing like a *carte du pays*—which, be assured, is not to be found in the

precincts of the Royal Exchange. Let us, however, try if we cannot remedy this ; and to do so I will deal frankly with you, provided you will assure me I may do so, without your being hurt with what I may advise ; which depends upon your own frankness in answering my questions. In the first place, then, is it your choice, your taste, and are you designed to follow your father's business ?”

Robert could not help blushing at the question. Why, he could not tell ; but he did blush, while he stammered out in a low voice, “ Certainly not either my choice or my taste.”

“ But you are designed for it, then ?”

“ I believe so—and yet—”

“ What ?”

“ I am more than ever disinclined to it, since I have been here.”

The Principal smiled, and nodding his head, answered with an emphatic “ I thought so.” He then added, in a dignified tone, “ This is indeed no place for lessons in trade.”

He, however, thanked Sterling for his candour, and went on—“ It is a pity, I think, with the progress you have made in common learning, even stinted as you have been, that your father had not opened more liberal views to you, before

he sent you here. A merchant's son is not exactly the person we want, or who suits well with this place, though there are colleges where he might be less out of his element. But a merchant himself can never, in the society here, be other than uncomfortable. In truth, though it is a rough truth, both scholars and men of real fashion think there is something in trade, whatever its respectability in its own way, which always thwarts the course of generous ambition, which it confines to the sole object of making money. Could your father, indeed, give you a million by way of capital, the tone of things might be altered; for such a preponderance of wealth might make up for other deficiencies. But as that is not so, I could almost wish, for your own sake, much as I desire to keep you, that he had sent you to Amsterdam, or Hamburg, to learn business, where business is in fashion, instead of to Oxford, or at least to this particular college in Oxford, where it certainly is not. For though the highest palms of learning may here be acquired, nothing but very high honours indeed can bring a man into that precise and select class of society which ordinary wealth will not, and indeed ought not to achieve."

Our poor aspirant was completely floundered

by this lowering intimation, which was given *ex cathedra*, and in a manner most oracular. And yet the oracle himself meant to do any thing but distress his *protégé*: for, perceiving the youth again much hurt, he caught himself up, and added, " Pray, observe, I mean no disrespect to your father; or to trade in general, still less to you; for, in truth, what I have said was more with a view to what I wish to suggest to your notice, than from any design to undervalue a most useful, and, in this country, a most respectable vocation, however removed from more elevated employments."

Here the doctor glanced his satisfied eye round his ample library, stopping a moment or so at the most ponderous tomes, and then resting it complacently upon the comforts of the apartment at large.

The youth, as in duty bound, expressed his thanks, and felt all curiosity to know what was coming.

" In short," pursued this learned magnate, " it has struck me that you would do well either to give up your commercial designation, and betake yourself with vigour to some of the learned professions, where you might in time distinguish yourself, or else retire from this house for some

one of less note, if not from the University altogether."

This was a cruel blow to our hero's already alarmed feelings, and death to his high-soaring ambition. He felt angry, confused, mortified, humbled, and scarcely capable of answering.

His fashion-loving uncle George had, indeed, sufficiently made him aware that there existed among many a prejudice (not less real for being a foolish one) against trade, in this trading country; but he now found that it was not confined to gentlemen-ushers and fluttering courtiers. Those who, from their absorption in literature and philosophy, he thought would be most free from it, seemed, in the instance of the learned Doctor Gaston, at least, to be most under its influence; and though he was a victim to it himself, he marvelled to think what there could be in a square cap, a black gown, or college *battel*, to give their owner, or inhabitant, such immense superiority, in his own mind, to a rich merchant, even though he were Lord Mayor.

Such, amid all his confusion, were his reflections, though the sense of the doctor's reputation for scholarship and knowledge of the great made him shrink from asserting himself. It even generated a fit of that *mauvaise honte* which we

have formerly noticed, as sometimes belonging to him; and he sat mute, twirling his fingers, though not at all indifferent to the hints as to a change of future plans which the Principal had thrown out.

“ Well, my young friend,” said the latter, more kindly, and after a pause, “ what think you of my suggestion? Hamburg and wealth, with middling society; or Oxford, learning, and the best company? Not that in this country a mere man of letters is of half the consequence of the little *abbés* in France. There is fashion in every thing, and it pleased the nobility in France to affect the character of learning, by patronising learned men, or those who chose to call themselves so; so that *homme de lettres* became a sort of title, and a passport into good company. But that is not the case in England; and a man, with us, to be at all distinguished beyond his own class of life, must be really pre-eminent in that learning or science to which his genius impels him, to overleap the bounds which our distinctions of society prescribe. Even *with* this pre-eminence, he is by no means sure of success; for a man of learning, except in its appropriate seats—here, for instance (and the Principal again looked round his room)—is not at all *necessarily* a man of fashion.”

The observation set young Sterling a thinking, and he began to allow his own mind fairer play. He was more fixed by what followed.

“Should you persuade your father,” continued the doctor, “to let you abandon the Exchange, and devote yourself really to letters (for which, if I did not think you had some genius, I should not wish to interfere)” — the youth looked pleased, and listened with all his ears — “in that case, I say, you must shape all your efforts to establish a reputation for abilities and learning, — for which regular application is absolutely necessary. You may thus obtain honours, and St. Swithin’s may be forgotten; and instead of being distantly recognised by those whom you affect, you may be courted by them.”

All this the young man thought very sensible; and the Principal, who was always in his glory in this sort of communication with his *élèves*, seeing that his suggestions were properly appreciated, took Sterling more and more into favour. Sterling, on his side, thought he had now a happy opportunity of opening to his patron, if he might so call him, the request he had made to his father, to exchange his stuff gown for a silk one.

The Principal stared, and asked if he had heard him right? He then frowned; and then

laughed. We have said he had a talent, we will not say a pleasure, in lowering the vanity of any one who deserved it. On this occasion he was really indignant, as well as surprised, that a poor cast-away citizen, as he thought Robert, and whom, out of pure compassion, he had intended to protect, and put into a right course under his own auspices, should have had the presumption to think and act for himself.

The good Principal often did very kind things, and was fond of helping youth in distress. It pleased his real benevolence, and gratified his love of power; but he did this in his own way. He had chalked out his own plan of bringing Robert forward, spite of his private education, and very homely connexions. He had done this from having observed a modesty, and what he thought a humble docility, in the youth, which insured his grateful deference to all he might advise. What was his surprise, and we may add, displeasure, to find that he had resolved to take so important a step, and display such decided ambition, from the mere suggestion of his own presumption.

“Pray,” said Dr. Gaston, with severity, “has any fool prompted you to this. We know you have no friend within these walls; but it seems

you have a confident in a merchant-tailor out of them—a scholar of St. John's. Has this person, whoever he is, had any share in prompting you to this extraordinary, and I must add, very silly, plan of yours to get yourself (I must use the appropriate word) *white-washed*?"

The son of ambition, though also resentful, was in a moment humbled to the dust. He was also unspeakably disappointed, for he flattered himself that his great friend would have been absolutely overjoyed at the prospect he indulged. In consternation, therefore, he mumbled, "No;" and said something of his father's being able to afford it.

"But it by no means follows that he will be willing," rejoined the Principal; "and I apprehend he has more sense than not to see that those who to their credit raise themselves from little or nothing by trade, can best preserve that credit by not seeking to blazon themselves too far. A citizen's son, if a good scholar, may here, by learning, achieve personal consequence. If he attempt it by other means, or merely by his purse, I am bound to tell you he will be laughed at. In short, there is a cloth of *frise* and a cloth of *gold*, that can never match together; and even you, after being entered as you are, to show such

a palpable design of becoming what you are not, will be in danger of imitating the cat in the fable, who was metamorphosed into a lady, but remembered her original condition whenever a mouse stirred."

This severity—more, we will allow, than was deserved, especially from one who, like Wolsey, matched himself with princes, though of humble birth himself—fell hard and bitter upon the poor under-graduate. He looked abashed, or rather did not know which way to look ; he was angry, yet frightened. Mortified to the quick, he seized his cap, and got up to take leave—which he did with very little ceremony—leaving the redoubtable Principal, for the first time in his life, discomposed at an interview with a subordinate of his college.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. STERLING MOODY.

"He that's proud, eats up himself."

SHAKESPEARE.—*Troilus and Cressida.*

IN truth, the good doctor's really good heart rather smote him. "I have hurt the boy," said he to himself; "but all for his good. A velvet cap from St. Swithin's would be an extraordinary thing. I have set myself against it, even with the sons of court bankers. These are not times to confound still more the distinctions of rank." By all which it should seem, if it have not so appeared already, that Dr. Gaston was no considerable aristocrat.

As for the poor aspirant, his misery was indeed great. He hurried to his rooms, with a quick step and palpitating heart, and throwing himself on his bed, gave way to an absolute flood of grief—of which, when we consider the cause, we are thoroughly ashamed. He vowed vengeance against his Principal, whom he

even called names, the softest of which were *up-start* and *time-server*—the latter any thing but deserved ; and at that moment two gold tufts, and as many velvet caps, passing his window in high glee and spirits, he wished them all, and himself too, at the bottom of the sea.

In this situation, like Achilles eating his heart, he passed near a quarter of an hour before he noticed a letter lying on the table, which had arrived during his absence. It was his father's answer, containing a flat denial of his request.

Sir Robert Sterling, as may have been perceived, though little brilliant, nay rather a plodder, was a man of that sort of sense called mother-wit:—*abnormis sapiens*. He had already begun to lament the hour when he gave way to his wife's wishes to remove his son from the peaceful, unpretending Hackney, to the superintendence of a proud private tutor, who took for pupils none but of "the genteelest families," and seemed much to have condescended in admitting Robert to a share of his attention.

As, when in town, the said tutor always lodged in a back-yard of Mivart's hotel, it was downright impossible for him to drag up to the neighbourhood of Cornhill ; and accordingly he had never seen Sir Robert but once (when they

met half way, at uncle George's lodgings), and Lady Sterling never at all. The citizen was, however, satisfied with his son's reported progress. He deferred much to the literary character of the tutor, which, in fact, added to his wife's importunities, mainly decided him in sending him to Oxford, instead of what was his own darling project, to establish him at Amsterdam. But young Sterling's letters gave him every thing but comfort; and in this Lady Sterling was a fellow-sufferer; for the letters did not conceal the mortifications of the writer. Even the plain good knight, generally so unruffled, vented a little spleen upon this occasion, and bestowed the appellation of proud pedant upon Dr. Gaston. He would then revive his complaints, that he had ever been persuaded by a foolish gentleman-usher, a woman who could know nothing of these things, and a parson who had no doubt his own ends to answer in serving his college (such were the notions of the cautious knight), —to make his son unhappy, by removing him from his proper sphere. "Grant," said he, "that he may get more Greek and Latin, which I have heard is very doubtful; will that teach him the knowledge of exchanges, which I want him to know? Then, as to his young sprigs of nobility,

if any thing could make me a radical, it would be the airs they give themselves; though that does not excuse this silly boy for taking it to heart. He must be moved—moved to Amsterdam; and then what will become of all the fees I have paid for him at Oxford?”

“There is a tide in the affairs of men!”

but this time it was not in favour of Robert Sterling. His letter, and request to become a Gentleman Commoner arrived in one of those moments of complaint just described, and the effect may be imagined. The knight of St. Swithin's would not hear of it. “He complains of their being all insolent puppies,” said he, “and yet he wants to become one of them himself.”

In vain Lady Sterling used her eloquence and intreaties, or talked of the lustre it would shed upon the family, and even the occasion it might give for the acquaintance of better connected young men than usually visited them: a critical point where there was a daughter just coming out. The merchant was inexorable.

“The boy,” said he, “has his fortune to make. I will not mar it by adding to his vanity. However,” he added, as if recollecting himself, “I know this is uncle George's doing; the

allowance is to be four hundred a-year. Let uncle George pay it, and I will consent."

This was the severest cut against the pinched courtier, his brother-in-law, the knight ever gave; though he was not disinclined to make hits against pride and poverty, when opportunity offered. The gentleman-usher, however, who found that Bloomsbury Square was really not intolerable, and far more convenient for dining than the verge of the City, put up with it, and peace was always preserved.

To return to Robert,—great was his mortification at his father's answer; the more so, because not only the Principal knew, and had ridiculed, his application, but he had not concealed it from others; and though he loved and respected Wilson, he had not been able to prevent a sort of seeming triumph over the scholar of St. John's from escaping in his manner and tone, when he confided to him his expectation of soon being upon an *equality* with the persons who had given him such uneasiness.

"And are you sure," observed the shrewd Wilson, "that your real object will then succeed? Will your velvet cap place you upon a velvet footing with these honourable exclusives? Will they speak to you the sooner, or forget the

more that you wore bombazeen and cloth when you first entered? Pray think, whether the evident design of the attempt will not bring down upon you the very ridicule you so much fear, instead of the honour you so much court."

Sterling never thought his friend so disagreeable, and more and more began to think that the Principal was right when he said there was something in trade that thwarted the course of all ambition, except that of making money. Great, therefore, was his chagrin when he found himself under the necessity of communicating to him that his design had failed. Wilson, however, calling upon him at that moment, he could not avoid it, and it produced no little unpleasantness between the friends.

The rough sense and decision of Wilson could not, or would not, enter into the nice sense of dignity, in other words, the vanity of Sterling, and Sterling could not bear the worse than no sympathy shewn him by Wilson. Yet he felt the force of the advice which he gave him, blunt as it was, to get the better of feelings to which he said he had no right.

"Every man," said Wilson, "has his place, and might be happy if he but knew and kept to it; quite as happy—quite as respectable as

those he thinks above him. It is only when a frog wishes to become an ox, that he becomes both miserable and—" "ridiculous," Wilson was on the point of adding : but he stopped in time.

Sterling was not pleased with the comparison, or this rough treatment of his wounded pride, which wanted to be soothed rather than cauterized. He felt distressed, angry and confused, and allowed Wilson to leave him in a sort of dudgeon any thing but becoming. He even went so far as to refuse his hand, when offered, and gave himself the airs of an insulted man.

"It is too true," said he, striding his chamber with indignation ; " we are not in the least alike, —we were not made to be friends. Nor is he of the description of those I was intended to associate with in this place. I wish I had had time to have closed my door against his visit, which he repeats too often."

In this Robert disclosed another of his follies, all proceeding from the same weakness. For though he liked as well as esteemed his early schoolfellow and family friend, he felt that the frequent visits of a Merchant Tailor's schoolman did little honour to the polite inmate of — College ; and in particular, that the honourable

Mr. Tylney, whose rooms were opposite to his, took quizzing notice of the scholar of St. John's, whenever he called. He had, therefore, even given hints to his friend, that their meetings should be more confined to St. John's, where the gardens were so convenient, as well as pleasant, for friendly communication. This hint, however, from not being understood, was absolutely thrown away on the straight-forward Wilson.

To do Robert justice, he bitterly and soon repented of his unkindness and disrespect to a man whom he was not so blind as not to own his equal; who was no way inferior, but, on the contrary, exceeded him in good sense, however fine his own intellect, and, unfortunately for him, however keen his sensibility. He brought himself, therefore, to severe account for all this; for his heart was good.

"The fellow is right," said he, "and I am a fool, and not a little of a beast. I can easily make amends by asking his pardon. Would to heaven I could as easily rid myself of this ridiculous pride he so justly blames, and from which I must and will recover myself!"

At this, he seized his academicals, and proceeded after his friend, whom he found at the

venerable gate of his college. In the way he met several of the objects of his envy, whose manners, though only the same with that of other young men (*un peu avantageuse*), and no more than the consequence of their age and spirits, he declared insolent, and, what is more, personally offensive to himself. This time, however, he behaved most philosophically. He remembered the resolution he had just been laying down to himself, and without shunning them, or looking defiance, as usual, as they passed, actually proceeded to his friend's rooms with a quiet pulse.

On seeing his friend, the frankness of his nature returned, and half embracing Wilson, who looked a sturdy sort of surprise, he said—"I am come to confess that I am a brute and a blockhead. I was angry with you for being too true a friend, and treated you rudely. You must forgive and forget ; truth is, I am a fool !"

Wilson, who, we have seen, though rough, was not unkind, became immediately alive to this, what he called, generosity. He returned his embrace, and said, "Depend upon it, you are neither a brute nor a blockhead, Bob !"

He said no more, for in truth he was a good

deal affected. The friends then sat down, and renewed the conversation which had been so abruptly broken off by Sterling's moodiness,—in accounting for which, Robert was forced to relate all that had passed with the Principal, whose insulting condescension, he said, was worse almost than his bitter taunts for having conceived the design upon the velvet cap.

Wilson still said he thought it would do him a great deal of good, and that, though a rough remedy, it might cure his disease. "You see, my good fellow," observed he, "though you have what is called a fine mind, it is but a sickly one after all; and though you are too proud to fly the field, I think there is nothing left for it but to take Gaston's advice: either quit his college for another, or quit all, and go to Amsterdam."

Sterling made a wry face at this. Amsterdam was now wormwood to him. "No!" said he, "never will I quill-drive. Rather would I be drowned in the Zuyder Zee."

"Come to us here, then!" said Wilson.

Sterling did not like to say that was worse; but at last he observed: "You forget there is a third alternative."

"What?"

"Study, learning, literary distinction."

“ Good ! you will then be like Horace’s wise man,

Liber, honoratus, pulcher, rex, denique regum.

You will soon soar above Mr. Tylney himself : at least here. What you may do with him in Bond Street I don’t know.”

“ Wilson, you are cruel,” answered Sterling. “ I acknowledge the weakness of my feelings ; but you should not play upon them.”

“ I am dumb,” said Wilson.

Both the friends paused, till Sterling, after musing some time, asked his companion if he knew what was the question just propounded by the University, for the under-graduates’ prize in Latin verse.

“ *Literæ humaniores*,” said Wilson. “ Are you inclined to try for it ? It would well second one part at least of Dr. Gaston’s advice to you.”

“ And you ?” asked Sterling.

“ O, no !” replied his friend ; “ I have not so polite a mind as yours, nor half your Virgilian taste for hexameters. My Virgil, you know, is to be Coke, Littleton, and acts of Parliament. But seriously, I would try ; and if you succeed, force the Tylneys and Selwyns, and all other Etonians, to admit you of their clique.”

Sterling shook his head, but smiled, and soon after the friends parted.

Wilson's suggestion was a mere piece of raillery, and so Sterling treated it; yet it is astonishing how it laid hold of his mind. To gain such *éclat* as success would give him, both in and out of the University—but, above all, to raise him in estimation far above the highest flights of a mere gentleman commoner—this gave such a stimulus to his ambition, that, from that moment, he could not part with the idea; and we are ashamed to own, that this last circumstance was much the most powerful of the incentives which operated upon him to think seriously of Wilson's random proposal. It is certain he could not sleep for meditating upon it, and from that time the Mantuan song was never out of his hands, and his soul "fed on thoughts that moved harmonious numbers." It is equally certain that he had never yet been so happy, nor so independent. He almost already looked down upon the striplings of fashion who had so annoyed him. He seemed absorbed with some great emotion which made other things little; his figure at lecture was more and more considerable; his themes were read in the hall, and his verses commended by the Principal himself.

This rather added to his ambition, by shewing that his object might be feasible, and that he might obtain the laurel, though competed by Eton.

Nobody now saw him except when all were seen. He was either buried among his books, employed chiefly upon classical criticism ; roving among the different gardens ; seeking the most retired spots ; or kindling his rapt spirit to a pitch of sacred vehemence, among the ruins of Godstow.

This, in a youth of nineteen, could not fail to challenge observation ; and Dr. Gaston, who had noticed, both with pleasure and surprise, how much his mind was allied to genius, when free from the alloy we have depicted, grew really so interested in his progress that he became no inconsiderable favourite. Homer and Shakspeare were in the Doctor's heart as well as at his fingers' ends, and he was struck, perhaps we may say astonished, that a lad born in St. Swithin's Lane, who threw off at Hackney, and finished under a private tutor, though that tutor was Etonian, could cap verses out of his two favourite classics, as well as the most thorough-bred public schoolmen. He now frequently said, " This young man is too good for Amsterdam ; we must not part

with him :” by which it should appear the good doctor had greatly changed his tone as to his career.

This operated in more ways than one in regard to Robert Sterling ; for it so far beat down the Principal’s own prejudice against the mixture of what he called incompatible materials, in forming the different societies of the young men under him, that he thought for once he might make an exception to his own rule, in favour of the merchant’s son. In doing this, too, it did not escape him that his own power would be not inconsiderably proved and illustrated by bringing it to bear.

However, the doctor knew that in this he had an ally. Among the *nob. fils.*, or rather the *nobiles* themselves, of the college, there had been one already who had begun to show something at least like common civility to Robert. He was of the same public lecture with him, and had the same tutor ; and, whether from the distinction he had obtained in his studies, and the taste for classical lore which he had exhibited, or whether this young nobleman’s nature (different in this from other young men) disapproved of the insulting coldness that had been shewn towards Sterling, he had certainly never joined, but had

rather opposed, the disposition to keep aloof from him, which we have recorded.

As he was, from the death of his father, a peer in his own right, and a public schoolman to boot, Lord Langston could afford this without losing caste; and as Robert's progress became more marked, and his rawness as a freshman wore off, this favourable disposition, though from a tuft to a commoner, shewed itself in a way very pleasing to something better than the commoner's vanity, though to that also by no means unpleasing. Their lecturing together created in time, as it did indeed with others, a sort of acquaintance, which however never could go beyond a most distant nod of recognition, unless known to one another from other circumstances. Without this, to speak was forbidden by all the laws of exclusiveness, human and divine. This, however, was broke through by young Lord Langston in Sterling's favour, even before the Principal had resolved to interfere for him. Langston, from his character as well as rank, was a favourite too with the Doctor, and it was to him that he determined to recommend our youth for protection. From what has been said, the task was not difficult. The young peer had no nonsense about him: he had an open heart,

a free manner, and a great fellow-feeling for genius and literary merit. But, besides this, he was peculiar in always resolving to think and act for himself; and being so independent in situation above the other young men of his own rank, he gave himself very little trouble about their opinions; while the respectability of his talents, and his firmness, made them cautious of entering into contests with him. Perhaps this did not make him so popular as some of his inferiors; but, at least, it did not diminish his weight and consequence, in carrying any measure of the *petite morale* which he chose to countenance.

When the Principal, therefore, after ascertaining his good opinion of young Sterling, asked him if he had any objection to meet him at dinner, he found a ready assent.

“Yet it will be difficult,” said Dr. Gaston, “to contrive a proper party for him; the gentleman is so strange a compound of pride and *mauvaise honte*. He has never yet forgiven Mr. Tylney for quizzing him on his arrival; and yet I am inclined to make them meet, if only to give them a fair chance of rubbing off their mutual asperities.

Lord Langston assented to this, and the party was accordingly fixed.

The good-natured scheme, however, of the doctor, was not quite so feasible as he imagined. Tylney, whose only talent was quizzing, in which his rank and expectations much aided him, had added to his sins against Sterling, by calling him sometimes the knight of St. Swithin's, and lately (alluding to his destination to Amsterdam, now perfectly well known) "the Dutch gentleman." This had so irritated our hero when he heard it, that he actually consulted Wilson upon the propriety of calling him out.

"To ruin yourself for ever," said Wilson ; "and what is worse perhaps for your own feelings, to spread still wider and wider an affront which, left to itself, will die away of itself, and perhaps already has died away."

"I should not mind it," observed Sterling, "had it come from any body else : but his very rank seems to authorize these airs in his own mind, and this I am determined to show my sense of."

"And be laughed at still more," answered Wilson, "by his whole clique of aristocratical dandies, who will protect him here, and after you are expelled, perpetuate in the world, what, if you will moderate your high-mindedness, may to-morrow be forgotten."

"I should deserve his quizzing," said Sterling, "if I took no notice."

"Consider how your challenge will run," interrupted Wilson. "Sir, as you have thought fit to call me the 'Dutch gentleman,' which has occasioned me to be laughed at ——"

"Hold!" said Sterling; "you are now yourself quizzing. Am I then to have no revenge? How can I curb this insolence, without doing what I say?"

"Quiz him again," said Wilson: "I never knew one of these monarchs of ridicule, who could bear a rebellion in their own subjects."

"But how? He is invulnerable, if only for his silk gown, which covers a multitude of impertinences."

"You are a strange medley," observed Wilson. "Here you are not afraid of being shot in your wish to shoot him, and yet you are afraid of his silk gown. However, if you want one of his own weapons, ask him, the next time he is saucy, how he construed 'Silvestram musam' in old *Tityre tu patulæ*."

"I don't know your meaning," said Sterling.

"And yet all his schoolfellows could tell you, for they have not forgotten it."

Wilson then related, what Sterling, from

entering later than Tylney, had not known, that the reputation of the latter for scholarship had preceded him at the university ; and when he first came, that the airs he gave himself made his fellow-students gladly listen to any little school gossip, that every body, more or less, experiences. Amongst others, his fame for understanding Virgil was quoted, as proved by the following translation he once made of

“ *Silvestram tenui musam meditaris avena.*”

Tenui, I have held fast, *silvestram musam*, a wooden muse, *avena*, on the shore, *meditaris*, of the Mediterranean.

This admirable hodge-podge produced a violent fit of laughter from Sterling. He forgot his anger and his projected duel in a moment, and heartily thanked Wilson for having taken such a method to expel his moodiness.

“ It will be impossible, henceforward,” said he, “ to care for what this blockhead may say or do.”

“ Notwithstanding his silk gown ?” asked Wilson.

“ Silk gown notwithstanding,” answered Robert, stoutly, and taking his leave.

Did he keep his word ? We shall see.

On returning to his college, he met his

enemy in the gateway, and was so impressed with what he had just heard, that far from bristling, as usual, which always amused Tylney, he almost laughed in his face, to the great surprise, and even annoyance of that gentleman, who could not understand the change. I say *even* annoyance, because, whatever his scholarship, Tylney possessed, and, indeed, owed much of his formidableness, which was considerable among all ranks, to that composed and unruffled intrepidity of assurance, which, Lord Chesterfield says, is so essential to high breeding. In short, whatever the occurrence, Mr. Tylney never seemed annoyed.

It was not that he was well-bred : far from it ; for good breeding and insult are incompatible. But he had that quietness of insolence, that total insensibility to any thing like self-blame, which confers almost all his power on the quizzer, and can seldom be acquired, but, like a genius for poetry, must be born with a man. This repose, or, more properly, self-possession, sits also generally most easily on men of birth and fashion, who, from acknowledged superiority in those respects, know nothing of the conventional restraints of society imposed upon others.

It was hence that we have noticed, as something unexpected, and almost unnatural, the annoyance of the honorable Mr. Tylney, at being apparently laughed at by "the Dutch gentleman." He could always bear, nay, almost rejoiced in, the proud, resentful air he sometimes exhibited; but this sort of defiance, partaking of rebellion, he could not account for; and in this humour on the part of both, they found themselves, to their inexpressible surprise, introduced to one another by the Principal in his library, and afterwards seated next to each other at dinner.

Here the superior tact and coolness of the fine gentleman carried it hollow over the plebeian. Tylney, perfectly at his ease, nay, *enjoué*, as far as the repose of his manners permitted it, with the other guests, all of whom he well knew, treated his new friend as if he had been an automaton, without language and without sense. The seat next to him seemed an empty chair, so totally unconscious did Tylney appear to be that it was occupied; while his attentions for others, and the self-complacency with which he spoke and looked (not smiled, for that his finery forbade), only made his behaviour more marked by the contrast.

We fear this made it fare ill with our hero, who in vain thought several times of the wooden muse. His ease and indifference would not return. He viewed his neighbour with his usual resentment, not so much for his ill behaviour to himself, as for his good behaviour to others. He was angry that his enemy should seem pleased, and he exemplified Sir Peter's feeling towards Lady Teazle: "She may break my heart, but she sha'n't keep her temper."

We grieve that truth compels us to allow, that the poetical justice of this history was, for some time, sadly violated in regard to this episode of Tylney and Sterling, who were any thing but Nisus and Euryalus; and but for Lord Langston and the Principal, we believe our Euryalus would certainly have quitted the field—that is, have gone to another college, given up all hopes of the prize, and perhaps even ended in Amsterdam.

Whether this might not have been better for his ultimate happiness, may be made a question. As it was, his desire of revenge against Tylney, and his poignant jealousy of the whole set to which he belonged, became both painful and interminable; while to be contented with associates more upon a level with himself, from

appearing like cowardice, was rendered daily more and more difficult.

He had nothing left for it but to plunge deeper and deeper into study ; to renew, with greater fondness than ever, his intercourse with the real Muse, which had been cruelly interrupted by him of the wooden one ; and to dream of those laurels, which, if gained, were to set every thing right.

In this he was much encouraged by Lord Langston, who, himself smit with the love of the *literæ humaniores*, though he would not write for the prize, became more and more struck with the genius Sterling evinced for them ; and their intimacy improving, Robert confided to him the secret of his aspirations.

His versification, thanks to the Etonian Barker, to say nothing of the Etonian Lambert, was always smooth, and, when the subject called for it, particularly animated.

Thus, when in his prize poem the Pastorals or Georgics of Virgil were the theme, or the Elegies of Tibullus lulled the soul, or Petrarch warbled his love to his melancholy fountain,—the verse proved pure, and gently stole upon the heart. But when he talked of

“ The eternal adamant of Homer’s throne ;”

or of the Mantuan,

“ Great, without pride, in modest majesty ;”

or of the Theban eagle,

“ Sailing, with supreme dominion,

“ Through the azure deep of air ;”

or of him,

“ Who rode sublime,

“ Upon the seraph wings of ecstasy,

“ The secrets of the abyss to espy,

“ And pass’d the flaming bounds of space and time ;”

then he himself displayed the holy fury of those fathers of verse whose enchantment he recorded.

Lord Langston, more and more struck with Sterling’s attainments, became more and more his friend ; and when he reflected that this was the man whom Tylney and his brother fops affected to look down upon, and saw the effect it had upon him (which indeed could not be concealed), he marked his sense of it in the strongest terms of reprobation. This bound them more together ; and the Principal more than once congratulated Robert on acquiring such a friend.

The effect upon him was happy ; for although I am afraid his original love of high people partook not a little of the mere vanity of uncle George, unaccountable as it was, yet his anxiety

about it proceeded more from too great a jealousy of supposed insult, than any gratification from the notice of more high, but otherwise ordinary persons. While unsupported, therefore, and left to fight the battle alone, he was, as we see, far from easy ; but the more than civility of such a man as the young earl, made Tylney and all his regiment of coxcombs dwindle into nothing. As far, therefore, as these were individually concerned, his recovery was perfect.

To be sure, his equanimity might be a little suspected, when, at a wine party at Lord Langston's, he turned his back upon Tylney for the two whole hours they were in company together, though seated close by him, and he never met him in the streets without endeavouring to infuse contempt into his looks.

And yet, what weakness ! Had it not been for having achieved the friendship of Lord Langston, this man of high attainments for his age, and destined to still greater, might have continued to be annoyed, not by the sting of a wasp, but the fluttering of a butterfly. With all the rest of the world, in parallel cases, and on a first introduction, this weakness continued.

But now arose a great epoch in the life of our youth. The poems on the subject of the *literæ*

humaniores, five in number, were delivered in ; and, with honest joy, Wilson broke into his room, where he had shut himself up in breathless expectation, to tell him of a report that he had gained the palm. With all his hopes and his labours to obtain this honour, he could scarcely believe it, till a message from the proper authorities announced it past a doubt.

Ere he could rouse himself, the Principal, who was one of the judges, sent for him. His heart beat high as he entered the well-known library ; but a sort of mortification ensued when, instead of smiles, and a burst of congratulation, the countenance of the redoubted Principal seemed peculiarly serious and dignified.

“ I have sent for you, Sir, to return you my thanks for the honour you have obtained for my college, as well as yourself, in gaining from, I assure you, no mean competitors, this great academical distinction.”

This was good, but formal and solemn, and not what Robert either expected or wished. To account for it, he began to think that Doctor Gaston might be displeased at his having so entirely concealed his intention from him, as it was one of his characteristics to wish for the unlimited confidence of the young men whom he

favoured. Wilson gave another, perhaps a better guess; for it is astonishing how all the other colleges busied themselves about the motives, conduct, and politics pursued by the Principal and officers of the college gaining the prize.

Dr. Gaston had always a great share in the adjudication, and it was said had, on this occasion, given his countenance to another candidate. This was a Mr. Henslow, an Etonian, and a person of known ability in the classics, and thence, from both causes, a particular favourite of the Principal. Nay, it was said, that it was by his special advice that he had become a candidate, and the disappointment of both the doctor and his *protégé* had been proportionably great.

This might have been a little founded in truth; but let us do justice to the upright mind of the Principal, who, notwithstanding this supposed prejudice, had unhesitatingly joined the other judges in awarding the prize where it was obtained. And though Eton a little suffered, yet as the college equally triumphed, the serious brow of the doctor soon cleared, and he was alive only to the merited, though unexpected, success of a private schoolman.

The result made a considerable alteration in

Robert's position, both in and out of college. He was no longer the raw freshman, the knight of St. Swithin's, whom nobody knew; nor even the Dutch gentleman, bound for Amsterdam; but the elegant scholar and man of genius, with whom all wished to be acquainted. He was, besides, the recognised friend of Lord Langston; and even the obdurate Tylney began to think he might be tolerated.

We are a little ashamed to relate the consequence of this; for it does not tell in favour of the *grandeur d'âme* of our friend. Tylney had actually sent him a note, begging to see him to wine; to which this answer was returned:—

“Mr. Sterling has received an invitation from the Honourable Mr. Tylney, which, not being acquainted with him, he supposes is a mistake, and therefore returns it.”

Tylney's comment upon this was sufficiently characteristic: “Damn the fellow,” said he, “he may wait long enough before he gets another.”

What surprised people, however, was, that the honorable dandy lost his self-possession, and actually broke into a rage at being, as he said, bearded by a *parvenu* from Bloomsbury Square. This told against him even among his own subjects, who said a man of real fashion was

never ruffled; and it was pronounced that his shield of superciliousness was not impenetrable.

These heart-burnings, however, soon passed away, and Sterling was left undisturbed to the contemplation of his new situation. In a conference sought by the Principal for that purpose, the latter, who was really anxious to keep him, sounded him again as to his original destination to trade, and finding that his honors had by no means diminished his aversion to it, fairly offered to propose an alteration of plan to his father, founded on his prospect of farther academical success.

Sir Robert, who, though as we have seen, he thought the counting-house and Amsterdam were worth more than all that learning could accomplish, was by no means insensible to the glory his son had acquired; and this was not a little enhanced by the compliments he received upon it from all the city members, and most of the aldermen. A very sensible letter, therefore, which the Principal wrote to him, highly favourable to young Robert's views to a learned profession, and a very urgent one from Robert himself, pointing at the bar or the church, although at first they threw the knight into what he called a sad quandary, were not alto-

gether rejected or despised. A suggestion, also, which Robert made, not without adroitness, that he had another son already preparing for the counting-house, and who would feel quite in his element at Amsterdam or Antwerp, engaged much of the old gentleman's attention.

"It is hard," said he, "that I cannot do as I will with my own son; but it is harder still to kick against the pricks. This Gaston, they say, has a deal of interest with the great people, whom he makes what they are."

At this, Lady Sterling came in to Robert's assistance; for he had written to her too, setting forth, among other considerations, the friendship with which he had been honoured by the Earl of Langston; and uncle George, who happened to be by when the letter arrived, by no means weakened its force, when he pronounced that the earl and his family were the very tip-top of the fashionable world, the dowager having been lady of the bedchamber to the queen, and the two young ladies, Euphrasia and Melusina, by far the most brilliant ornaments of the court. Their house, too, was in Grosvenor Square. Heavens! what a prospect for the friend of their brother, and by reflection, perhaps, for his parents themselves.

These were considerations not at all thrown away upon good Lady Sterling, who listened with very great complacency indeed to all that uncle George said about them. The knight, too, felt the *éclat* of the prize; and the friendship of a peer added to the weight of the Principal's recommendation; so that at length he was heard to say, that he believed the boy might do worse.

The result was, that time should be taken to ponder the proposal; and meanwhile brother William was told to hold himself in readiness to be consigned as an *élève* to Pye, Rich, and Wilkieson's house at Amsterdam.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW MR. STERLING ACCOMPANIED A GREAT NOBLEMAN TO HIS CASTLE, AND OF HIS RECEPTION THERE.

“Herein fortune shows herself more kind than is her custom.”—SHAKESPEARE, *Merchant of Venice*.

ROBERT was now expected home, it being the long vacation. But though he would have had pleasure in witnessing the pleasure of his father and mother at the honours he had acquired, the very little chance there was of his meeting any one other person among their acquaintance who could appreciate the real value of literary reputation, threw cold water, he said, upon the prospect. He was fated, however, not to be put to the trial, by an event of the very first consequence to his subsequent conduct in life. This arose from the effect it had in confirming for ever all those prepossessions and refinements of feeling, which, for good or

for evil, we have seen had long exercised an influence on his character and happiness.

The vacation commencing, Lord Langston prepared to join his mother and sisters at Langston Castle, in Berkshire ; but, from fondness of reading, and similarity of taste in what they read, he did not like to part with his new friend, and very frankly proposed that he should join his family party at the castle. "You will find my mother, perhaps," said he, "a little stiff at first ; for she still too often thinks herself behind Queen Charlotte's chair ; but as for the girls, you need not be afraid of their boring you with ceremony. Besides, as I mean to be *en philosophe* with you, and am rather, as you know, *helluo librorum*, we shall not permit them to plague us, even if they are so disposed."

Robert could hardly believe his senses at this proposal. He turned very red, stammered, and said something about pleasure and condescension ; but though the invitation filled him with fears, from his conscious want of sufficient breeding to encounter a countess, and an earl's sisters, to say nothing of an earl's castle, still he felt too excited in his favourite ambition to flinch from it. The matter, therefore, was soon arranged.

Scarcely had the engagement been made, when he hastened to his confidant, Wilson, to ask his advice whether he should accept it.

"Have you not determined to do so?" asked Wilson.

"Why, pretty nearly so."

"Come, say fairly, is it not quite so?"

"Well; and if it is?"

"Why then my advice is of no consequence."

"But I want your opinion."

"I don't know how to give one. I only know what I would do, or rather not do, myself."

"You would not then accept it?"

"Decidedly."

"But why?"

"Because I am not made of the stuff to please earl's daughters, *and I know it.*"

Sterling looked confused, perhaps hurt, certainly disappointed.

"Observe, my good fellow," continued Wilson, "I only speak of myself. I am mere matter of fact. You have poetry in you; and ladies love, or pretend to love, poetry."

"There is something more in this than you choose to acknowledge, Wilson."

"Well, but it is settled, and there's an end."

"But not if there is any objection—that is,

any very *great* objection—which I don't see"—continued Sterling.

"You, perhaps, may meet some of the Tylney family there."

Sterling coloured.

"I do not mean his relations, but men or women of the same kidney; and that would not suit you," added Wilson.

"Umph! but I should be the best judge of that," persisted Sterling.

"I doubt it," said Wilson, shaking his head. "Besides ——"

"What?"

"You will never be able to bear Bloomsbury Square again."

"Come," cried Robert, "if that is all, I think I shall be pretty safe. But you are so oracular, you frighten one. I, however, shall be chiefly with Langston in his library, and that is only what we are here."

"Good," said Wilson; "but enough. I am off to-morrow. Have you any commands to your father and mother? Shall I tell them my prophecy about Bloomsbury Square?"

"They'll not believe it, if you do," answered Sterling; and here the friends separated.

"There is something in the rugged pith of

this man," said Robert, as he soliloquized in his way home, "that generally rebukes me. Yet what the devil is there to fear? Certainly, nothing in Langston himself, nor, I suppose, in his castle. Can three petticoats, then, make such a difference, and one, as I guess, a starch old woman? Pooh! Wilson and I are not alike. His happiness lies little in refinement, or high ambition; mine, perhaps, too much. But courage! *Allons, mes enfans, à la gloire.*"

Now it will, perhaps, be recollected, that when that paragon of old men of fashion and men of honour, Lord Ogilby, uttered these cheering words, the Wilson he carried about with him (very different from our Wilson)—in short, the illustrious Canton—could not help exclaiming, "Be-gar, mi lor is one coque of de game!" So Lord Ogilby thought himself, and so, perhaps, did Sterling, when he burst out in the same strain. It is certain, though tolerably frightened at the prospect of being domesticated with people so entirely beyond his sphere, he would not have shrunk from it through the fear of any penalty. His curiosity, as well as ambition, was kindled. He was aware of his disposition to jealousy, and taking things wrong, and he even knew his liability to *mauvaise honte* in

the company of his superiors. Still he was determined to go on. "My fate," said he, "may perhaps depend upon it;" and he longed for the hour of departure.

The journey was not far. A very few hours brought them in sight of the castle, towering among woods; and two immense columns supporting military trophies, both of old and modern warfare, which flanked the outer gates, gave an imposing specimen of what might be expected within. Lord Langston was, in truth, descended from a long line of ancestors, chiefly military, from the conquest to beyond Marlborough; and the memory of these was perpetuated in various ways, by artificial representations all over the place. The gates were a mile from the mansion, and Robert had full time to recover his self-possession, and to lose it again in wondering at his situation; seated as an equal by the side of a peer, of plain sense and natural manners—but still a peer—whose guest, by his own invitation, he was about to be, amid his "old hereditary trees," and a castle of six hundred years' standing.

The contrast between this and the gloom of St. Swithin's, where he first saw light, or rather darkness visible, and, still more, between what he expected to see and his old associates, struck

powerfully upon his fancy, and unstrung his nerves — never particularly strong. He even trembled with emotion, so that his companion asked if he was not well. But all reply, if he had one, was precluded by the approach of a vision (for so it seemed), such as his fancy, even when he wrote his prize poem, had never yet conceived. He had read of oreads and dryads, of fairies and genii, but never till now had his imagination (though a poet's) bodied forth the form of things unknown, as his eye now did, at the sight of perhaps the most graceful girl that ever made a man think woman lovely.

It must be owned, that if grace meant to show itself, never could it have chosen a situation set off to greater advantage. The fineness of a form and the symmetry of limbs, such as are seldom seen except among Grecian gems, appeared here in all the fascinating ease of a perfect horse-woman. She was mounted upon a beautiful Arabian, of blood as high as her own, and who, like the steed of Bolingbroke, "his aspiring rider seemed to know." The aspiration, however, here was any thing but Bolingbroke's; for it seemed to be only to have the power of directing at pleasure the elegant creature she rode, into what-

ever paces suited her humour, whether stately and solemn, or frolicsome and gay. In this she succeeded so perfectly, that the eye seemed to drink admiration. To finish the picture (though that was not wanting), her garments floated in such folds about her person, and a little hat, from under which, in her riding, several dark ringlets had escaped, gave such an air to her small and pretty head, that what one had heard of the sylphs and sylphids seemed realized.

But if this was the effect at a little distance, the admiration was exceeded on her approach. A physiognomy that sparkled with gaiety and innocence, features that spoke, and an eye that laughed, told eloquently of the heart within. Her cheek gave the notion of the most vivid health, and her smile (for she smiled) proclaimed the joy of natural spirits and sensibility to happiness.

This smile was kindled by the sight of her brother, the happy Langston, whom she had rode forward to meet, and whom, as if it was the only thing wanting to complete the charm, she greeted in that silvery tone of voice which so enhances, and, at the same time, is so absolutely necessary to, female attraction.

"My dear, dear, Langston," said she, "I thought you so long coming, I could not wait, and mamma and Euphrasia are behind ; but—"

Here she was cut short by the sight of Sterling, who she did not know was in the carriage, and who, indeed, had been totally concealed by Langston's having leant forward, almost through the window, to receive the greeting of his sister.

That over, the ceremony of introduction was immediately gone through, in which Lady Melusina (for such she was) shewed a change from that charming exuberance of frankness, which was her nature, to the more dignified tone of conventional manners. The change struck deep into Sterling, who instantly set it down to his unfortunate inferiority in every respect to one who, in truth, appeared to him not less than an angel.

This, however, was not the only alarm he had to encounter ; for an avant groom, in green and crimson and jockey cap, on a brisk trot, announced the approach of the dowager countess and her eldest daughter. They were in an elegant park phaeton drawn by two milk white Arabians, compeers of that rode by Lady Melusina, driven by the countess herself, and attended by another groom. The greetings between

mother and son, and brother and sister, were, as may be supposed, most affectionate, but, on that account, only more awkward, and even distressing to poor Sterling, who, as indeed any other person might, found himself *de trop*—a situation always uncomfortable to one's self-love. But, besides this, he had to undergo the ordeal of another introduction; and the manner of both the ladies, but particularly of the countess, struck him as far more stately than that of the Lady Melusina. Lord Langston, who knew his foible, and saw he was distressed, did all that good nature could suggest to put him at his ease; but in vain. St. Swithin and a whole train of ordinary aunts and cousins stalked before his eyes, and only made the contrast between them and the superior beings he now saw still more distressing to his feelings. He was helpless, humbled, and dismayed.

Who can account for these contradictions in our nature? Here was a youth, with what we may call a fine mind, sensible, buoyant, and alive to elegant manners—nay, unable to endure the want of them; yet, when thrown with them in such a way, and with such advantages, as he never could have contemplated, was oppressed, humbled, and paralyzed, by a sort of factitious

refinement concerning his own situation and character, which men far his inferiors were wholly without.

What would have been the impression made upon the sturdy Wilson by these shining beings is problematical ; but he most assuredly would have done himself more justice than his sensitive friend. St. Swithin's, Shoreditch, Tower Ditch, and even Houndsditch might have started into his mind, and yet not have clouded his vision or obscured his intellect. Which of the two had the keenest sensibility, might be doubtful ; which was the most independent, and therefore the happiest, was out of all question.

To say truth, however, there was a little, a very little, hauteur in the character as well as manner of the countess, who had not forgot the early court of George III. Perhaps this was also participated by her daughter Euphrasia, so as to have intimidated, on a first introduction, a person far more phlegmatic than our friend. In this, too, they were not altogether without resemblance, in the younger, and less restrained manners of Melusina herself ; but all soon wore off upon farther acquaintance. At present the ladies were too much occupied with their son and brother, to give poor Sterling much trouble by a

scrutiny, which was at least postponed; and his own proposal to leave them to each other, while he proceeded slowly to the castle, was approved and accepted.

"This was very considerate of your friend," said the countess; "he seems well-bred, though you said he was new to the world. He is, at least, without the pushing assurance that now distinguishes our modern youth. It was not always so."

"He is handsome," said Lady Melusina.

"I did not observe him much," said Lady Euphrasia.

"He wants encouragement," said Lord Langston, "which I must bespeak for him."

"So much the better," observed the countess.

"'Tis a fault on the right side."

Before they had reached the castle, Robert was already there, and had had an opportunity of examining some of its features. An immense hall, that favourite characteristic of an English residence, whether modern or ancient, in which almost all our continental neighbours are so deficient, at first engaged his interest. The banners and casques, the shields and lances, and the portraits of all times, since portraits began, though not new to him (for he was familiar with

them at Oxford), fixed his eye, and still more, his reflections. Bishops, and kings, and founders of colleges, in a college hall, were only what seemed natural—they were a part of the walls, and created no particular sensations. But here were the indices of an individual family, displaying a long line of ancestry, which had been rooted for ages in this identical spot; every relic declaring them of the nobility of the empire, many of them known in its history, and all proclaiming a marked distinction between them and their new visitor.

All this by no means relieved our hero from feelings, already sufficiently alarmed by his recent introduction to their refined descendants. Lord Langston at college, indeed, seemed not *much* more than another scholar; the only great difference being his gold tuft; which, while all were engaged in the same studies, was brought down to something nearer equality. But here, amid the

“Boast of heraldry and pomp of power,”
and, might we not now add,

“All that beauty, all that wealth ere gave,”
he seemed elevated to a height which made the poor, unfledged merchant’s son, sensitive as we have described him, shrink within himself. In

this he knew he was as foolish as we ourselves think him ; nor are we sure, as it proceeded from weakness rather than modesty, that we agree with the countess, when she thought it was a fault on the right side.

Out of the hall proceeded an immense staircase, cut into ponderous diamonds and lozenges, and a variety of grotesque ornaments of the ancient time. This conducted to a suite of apartments, the prevailing taste of which was grandeur, but much combined with elegance. Here Lord Langston's valet, to whom Sterling had been confided on leaving the ladies, shewed him into a bed-chamber hung with velvet, with a light closet, in which books were mingled with dressing apparatus, and looking over woods, which seemed not merely coeval with the castle, but to have been there ever since the flood. This, he was told, on the authority of a most respectable lady, in a silk gown, who was putting things in order, was destined to his use. The valet, with great civility, offered his services, and informed him that a sort of tocsin, which was then echoing from the walls, announced that it was time to dress for dinner.

How new was this to our fortunate scholar ! He could not proceed for thinking of it, but

threw himself into an arm-chair, with gilt legs, which had been in the presence-chamber in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and, instead of dressing, fell into a reverie, in which all the ordinary things that had passed in his life up to this moment of enchantment, moved in review before his charmed eyes. In this be sure the fairy vision of the females he had seen in the way hither was not forgotten. Yet, strange to say, his mind was still so haunted by the contrast, that he was by no means the happier for it. "It is impossible," said he to himself, "they should know who I am, or the mushrooms from whom I am sprung. Ah!"— But here he checked himself; for though he wished ardently and fondly that he had been born in a higher station, he felt all the kindness and goodness, in their way, of his father and mother, and hated himself if an undervaluing thought of them ever came across him.

From his reverie he was roused by Lord Langston, who had just come in, and who, with good-nature as well as good-breeding, came up to see that he was comfortable in his new apartment; telling him, moreover, that he had not above ten minutes to dinner, and that he would send Williams to help him in a moment. Against this, however, our scholar protested.

“ My God ! ” said he, shutting the door, “ what a contrast to that titled blackguard, Tylney ! ” In this we will not stop to consider how far he was right or wrong ; for dinner waits, and we must get to it as soon as we can.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. STERLING IS SUPREMEPLY HAPPY.

“ Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes.”

SHAKSPEARE.—*Twelfth Night.*

THE dinner, which was rather after the countess's taste than her son's, was sumptuous, and sumptuously served. Plate—some of it gilt, all of it rich; the finest old Dresden china; flowers, and noble fruits; viands, of course of the best; six servants, one behind each chair, though only the family;—all this denoted magnificence. At the same time, the regular order in which all was conducted—the seemingly devoted attention of the major-domo to the countess, and that of all to Lord Langston and the young ladies—only appeared the more remarkable, for the perfect ease and freedom from restraint with which they received it as a thing perfectly of course. The conversation was equally easy, and the good-

nature of his host and hostess, who saw the constraint he was under, so wrought upon our *parvenu* (for so I fear we must here call him), that before all was concluded he began to feel himself somewhat more his own master.

He was all the better for it ; for the stateliness of the dowager, and the *recherche* in dress of her daughters (another of her tastes), had rather added to his natural backwardness ; so that he was far from doing himself justice. He had blundered sadly indeed in the outset ; for Lord Langston having desired him to give his arm to his mother, he hung back, and positively eluded it, so that his friend was forced to escort the lady himself ; and as offering his arm to either of the young divinities seemed to him to be a still greater solecism, they were left to take care of each other ; and he followed in the rear, very like a bashful school-boy, whom he in many other respects not a little resembled.

If this appear unnatural—and it may so to many an aspiring, pushing candidate for notice, above the restraints of such vulgar sensibilities—let them only recollect the rawness of our youth, his total inexperience of such company as he had got into, and above all, what those who laugh at him may not be troubled with, the

effect of a consciousness of inferiority which they never feel.

The great good-nature however of Lord Langston, and his acquaintance with the foible of his humble friend ; the protection he seemed to stand in need of (not at all displeasing to the countess, when seemingly so sued for) ; added to the real affability and unsophisticated nature of the girls, high as they were ; all this by degrees effected the change in Robert's nerves and demeanour, of which it must be owned he stood so much in need.

All the ladies had cultivated understandings ; and Langston had sent them a free translation of his friend's prize poem, which had given them the highest idea of his taste, particularly in one so young. He was also, as Lady Melusina had already pronounced, handsome ; and though bashful from inexperience, and, as the countess was pleased to say, from *respect*, he was by no means vulgar. A city knight, and Bloomsbury Square, indeed, denoted little of fashionable or illustrious ; but neither did Hanover, nor any other square, not even Grosvenor itself, in her ladyship's mind, if the inhabitants were not distinguished (as many of them were not) by superior birth, manners, and attainments. Though much devoted to the first, the two last had always

so far attractions for this high, but by no means frivolous lady, that the possessor of them always drew from her unaffected consideration. On the other hand, she was so wrapt up in her son, and had so much esteem for his judgment, that any one he respected was sure to gain from her more than the mere lofty politeness which she bestowed upon all who had not forfeited it by fault or misconduct. Even if it had not been so, both she and her daughters were too really what they seemed,—*ladies* in the most exact sense of the word,—to make him feel additional distress by any unpleasant exhibition of an unfavourable opinion of him, even if they had entertained one.

More at his ease, therefore, and the happier for it, Robert became more natural, and was almost even agreeable, when he allowed his friend to draw him out upon topics in which the current of his mind favourably displayed itself. Oxford; the associations of history with the place he was in, particularly drawn from Clarendon, the countess's favourite historian; poetical descriptions, and much of the *belles lettres*, prompted by allusions on the part of the young ladies (who seemed to have a perfect idea of it) to the prize poem;—these made him almost eloquent. He felt in a new world—his eyes sparkled

with feeling—he admired the beauty of his young hostesses, was dazzled by their elegance, and adored their condescension. The awe too he had felt for the dignity of their mother was a good deal relieved, by finding that it could be softened in his favour; and before they quitted the table he found himself far advanced towards what had always seemed heaven to his fancy, but of which he had hitherto despaired—the enjoyment of high and polished society, without being ashamed of himself.

When the ladies withdrew, of course he was talked over.

“There is more in him than at first appeared,” said Lady Melusina.

“I never knew Langston wrong in his judgment,” said the countess.

“It is a pity he has seen so little of good company. He was absolutely, at first, almost sheepish,” observed Lady Euphrasia.

“We will polish him,” answered Melusina, rather archly. “Shall we patronise him? Will your dignity be hurt if you tolerate him, sister?”

“Perhaps not *in the country*,” replied Lady Euphrasia, “and *faute de mieux*.”

“He is better than Mr. Trippet, at any rate,” returned Melusina, “whom you know, with all

our pains, we could never teach the gallopade. Do you think he can dance?"

"Your spirits run away with you child," said the countess. "He is Langston's friend, and I will not have him laughed at."

"Indeed, mamma," returned the sprightly girl, "I did not mean to laugh at him, or any man of genius, especially, as you say, Langston's friend; only you know we all allow ourselves to be diverted, Miss Sycamore and all, when we try to make Mr. Trippet do the gallopade, which he says he is particularly surprised that he cannot perform, as his father was gentleman-usher to one of the princesses, and he once tried it at a ball in Green Street."

This hit at gentlemen-ushers and Green Street, unintended as it was, passed at the moment the gentlemen were entering the room from table, and immediately covered Robert's whole body with scarlet, much more his face; but as it was while he was moving, it was not perceived. At the same time he felt, if Green Street was so apparently fleered at, what must be the fate of Bloomsbury Square.

Mr. Trippet was neither more nor less than the curate of Doctor Langston, uncle to the earl, who had the rectory; but having also a

deanery in another diocese, where he generally resided, he allowed his deputy to live in the rectory-house, close by the castle. This Mr. Trippett having a few peculiarities, these sprightly young ladies, when amusement ran low, used sometimes to request it as a great favour that he would help them to fill up a quadrille in an evening ; in which he was always assigned as a partner to Miss Sycamore, their governess, who still lived with them.

Mr. Trippett, who had more learning than sense, did not perceive that he was the occasion of amusement to the ladies who, he supposed, so favoured him ; but as he had more vanity than either sense or learning, it would have signified little if he had.

As it was, it added greatly to his happy self-importance with the ladies,—in regard to whom, in consequence of this distinction, he had a sort of Malvolio feeling.

He had, however, with all his self-complacency, and attempts to learn certain hard steps which the ladies had amused themselves with *endeavouring* to teach him, never succeeded in obtaining their hands as partners. They were always engaged, either to their brother, or any chance company that happened to be present, or danced

with one another. The poor curate seemed studiously avoided, and, as has been said, was always turned over to Miss Sycamore; nor could he, even with Miss Sycamore's help, divine why.

Whether this arose from any objection on the part of the countess, who thought condescension might be carried too far; or that the young ladies themselves, though they took the liberty of playing upon the vanity of this simpleton, did not chuse him to come nearer to an equality with them; we will, without quite defending them, decline to inquire.

What Lady Euphrasia said was however true,—that even the lengths they went could only be permitted in the *country*, and as an amusement, *faute de mieux*.

This was a favourite expression of hers; and the sentiment, which was uttered in Robert's hearing, after he had joined the drawing-room coterie in which the conversation had been continued, struck upon his jealous ear, and for a while poisoned his enjoyment.

He was, in fact, more than once in danger of relapsing, particularly when the countess asked him if Sir Robert had no country-house?

Alas! the citizen box he had on Lavender Hill, where the stage-coach took him up and set

him down all the summer through, only shrank into a smaller nutshell, from looking round the castle. Lavender Hill, too, the *pen* of little merchants, small lawyers, brokers, and clerks in office ! The very thought confounded him, and he answered, we are sorry to say with how little ingenuousness, “ Yes ! his father had a country-house in Surrey.”

This subterfuge did not make him happy. He took himself severely to task, became thoughtful, looked at the closing evening, and began to wish for a solitary walk in the wood.

Opportunely, a walk was proposed, though the countess thought it was too late, and declined ; but the younger party sallied forth to enjoy the freshness, which they did with all the exuberance of youth and romance. The place, the time, the season, the novelty, and above all, his companions, lifted our friend to enthusiasm. He seemed never to have lived before, and, luckily for himself, forgot his restraints.

It was not too late for nightingales, and the concert was delicious. All voices were stilled while the music went on. Even breathing was repressed, in order not to interrupt it. Hearts as well as ears were gratified.

Had his new friends been farmers' daughters,

may, I believe grisettes from St. Swithin's (certainly from Tottenham Court Road), his romance alone would have made him happy; but to have an earl's daughters as companions, uniting the manners of a court with these pleasures of nature—it was too much—he was dizzy with the sorcery of it.

The songs went on for many minutes, when Philomel, jealous of interruption, flitted into a deeper covert, and left our young group wondering with one another.

All wished to express their admiration.

"If any thing could make a poet," said Lord Langston, "it would be this."

"I expect some beautiful verses from the poet of the *belles lettres*," said Lady Melusina.

"I will be content with Milton's, and that he should criticise them," said Lady Euphrasia.

"It would be pleasant," observed Langston, "particularly at such a moment as this, to enumerate all that has been said of the nightingale by different poets, or even only one, when so varied for example as in Milton."

"She seemed his favourite bird, and almost his muse, at least when in the woods," observed Sterling.

"I dare say you can repeat all the passages,

Mr. Sterling," said Lady Melusina. "There is a charming sonnet express to her; I wish I could remember it in this spot."

Robert recited the first stanza *con amore*; the more so, from observing the interest taken in it by his high-born companion.

"Oh! nightingale, that from yon bloomy spray,
Warblest at eve when all the woods are still;
Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart doth fill,
While the jolly hours lead on propitious May."

"Delightful!" said the ladies; "but pray, Langston, don't let your suggestion drop. Give us some more of these descriptions from your Miltonian stores."

"What think you," said Langston, "of the lines where the bird of night, like her we have just heard,

'Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid,
Tunes her nocturnal note?'"

"Charming!" said both sisters.

"Or," proceeded he—

'The love-born nightingale, who
Nightly to thee (Echo) her sad song mourneth well,'

"Or again, where she is called

'The night warbling bird, that now awake,
Tunes sweetest her love laboured song.'

“ Or the ‘ amorous bird that sang spousals ;’
or the wakeful one

‘ Who all night long her amorous descant sung.’

How do we love her ‘ tuning her strain ?’ How
invoke her

‘ In her sweetest, saddest plight,

Smoothing the rugged brow of night ?’

Lastly, how endlessly do we feel (though so
generally felt, that it is almost too common-
place to remember it) that she

‘ Shuns the noise of folly,

Most musical, most melancholy.’ ”

“ Pray,” said Sterling, “ how do you interpret
that last line ? Is it as it first appears, namely,
that she is *both* musical *and* melancholy ; or, as
I am inclined to think, most musical when
most melancholy ? ”

“ An ingenious distinction,” said Lord Lang-
ston, “ and I incline to your opinion.”

“ Why does Shakspeare say so little of the
nightingale ? ” asked the ladies.

“ I suppose,” said their brother, “ because he
said so much of every thing else ; but I am
rather glad of it, for it left so much more to
Milton.”

“ Yet Milton,” observed Sterling, “ describes
her as you say, as the love-lorn, the amorous

bird, without reference to the '*Philomela mærens sub umbra*' of Virgil, wailing her young."

"That would be true tragic," said Lord Langston.

"But it is beautifully put by Spencer," answered Sterling.

'Hence with the nightingale will I take part,
That blessed bird that spends her time of sleep,
In songs and plaintive pleas, the more t'augment
The memory of his misdeed that caused her woe.'

"That is very beautiful, indeed," said Lady Melusina.

"It has been referred by some," continued Sterling, "to the crime of Tereus; but I rather think that is too far-fetched, though poetic enough."

"Ovid would have so construed it," observed Langston. "But it grows late and cold, girls, and mamma will scold."

"It is all your's and Mr. Sterling's fault," said Lady Melusina, "for being so agreeable."

Robert felt as if electrified with this speech.

CHAPTER X.

ROBERT STERLING IN A DREAM.

“ Am I a lord, and have I such a lady ?
Or do I dream, or have I dream'd 'till now ?
I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.
I smell sweet savours, and I feel soft things.
Upon my life, I am a lord, indeed ;
And not a tinker, nor Christopher Sly.”

SHAKESPEARE.—*Taming of a Shrew.*

THE evening described in the last chapter was the happiest of Sterling's life ; perhaps happier than any he ever passed afterwards ; for he thought it a dream—and we are always happiest in dreams.

As the countess looked a little alarmed at their staying in the wood so late, Lady Melusina, with a smile, which would have sealed her peace had her mother been really displeased, said, “ Indeed, mamma, it was all William's and Mr. Sterling's fault ; for they raved about the nightingale to such a degree, that we could not

get away. I am not sure whether the real one we listened to was as sweet 'as those they described from Milton and Spencer."

This produced a complaint from the countess, that she had been excluded from sharing in this pleasure, to which she claimed a right as well as her daughters; and it ended in the gentlemen being called upon to make up the loss, by reading from the authors themselves what their memory only had hitherto supplied. In short, the books were sent for, and reading, and comments—some grave, some lively, all pleasing—crowned this eventful day to general satisfaction, and the felicity of Robert Sterling was perfect.

In the morning, when he waked, he felt like one of those enchanted wights we read of, whom genii and fairies have exhausted their humour to play upon and deceive; or, rather, he was like that Christopher Sly himself, the honest tinker, whom we have quoted at the head of this chapter, who did not know whether he was a lord or not. Certain it is, that when Williams, my lord's valet, called him by appointment, he knew not where he was, and began to question, whether all that had flitted before him in the shape of noble and attractive ladies, on milk-

white palfreys, obsequious squires, banquets, and polished conversation, had not been the effect of some enchantment, the spell of which he dreaded every instant would be broken.

The sight of the ladies, however, who were already up, and breathing the morning air before breakfast on the terrace below, convinced him that he was not dreaming, and that he was not at Oxford, and still less in Bloomsbury. "How delightful," said he, "to see beings so noble, so little sophisticated, so entirely natural in their tastes and habits! What would even Wilson say to this?"

Their appearance hastened his own, and he was charmed at being received by the whole family with the same good breeding that characterized their reception of him the day before. If there was any thing not quite perfect to his feelings, it was perhaps a little remaining stiffness in the countess, who frequently, instead of calling her son by the endearing name of William, bestowed upon him his title of Lord Langston; in which, to Robert's surprise, she was *sometimes* imitated her daughter Euphrasia. Melusina, however, sparkled with her usual vivacity, and usual freedom.

The breakfast had the addition of Miss Sycamore, a lady of about forty years, of great genius, and a consequent admirer of the prize poem, which she only wished she could read in the original Latin—which Lord Langston declared she could. At any rate, her admiration, which was not at all concealed, conciliated the author very comfortably.

She had a very scrutinizing countenance, which exercised itself on all that Robert said or did, and often exchanged meaning glances with her quondam pupils, who seemed to show her great consideration; and Robert thought her an ally evidently worth cultivating. After breakfast they had music, of which Robert found out she was a perfect mistress, and she discovered that in evening amusement he would make an excellent figure in a *tableau vivant*.

All the morning long the ladies retired within themselves, and Lord Langston engrossed his friend in showing him the curiosities and beauties of the castle, its monuments of ancient art, and magnificent offices. Robert was enchanted with every thing, but soon grew listless for luncheon; because afterwards a riding-party had been settled, in which the ladies were again to take part.

It came, and Robert was again in elysium.

So again at dinner, and so he hoped again in another evening walk, but it rained.

However, the party had now been reinforced by a very high lady, of great fashion, and who measured all other people's merits by their pretensions to a place in the same temple in which she herself worshipped. This was Lady Trelawney, a friend and great admirer of the countess, because the latter was not only superior to her in rank (for she was only a viscountess), but, from some cause or other, possessed a greater consideration and following, without pains or trouble, among the *haute noblesse*, than she, who almost made it a business, could acquire. However, she too had been of the old court, and, like the countess, was fond of talking over the good Queen Charlotte, and her fine family, particularly the Prince of Wales. They, therefore, wanted no amusement; and this gave fresh interest to Robert's curiosity in his favourite study of the manners, looks, and conversation, of persons of really high consideration.

There was also a young son of Lady Trelawney, who seemed disposed to give himself airs; and a daughter, who, not having been long out of the school-room, was a little more natural.

They were not old enough to annoy friend Robert much ; but they gave him no pleasure, and he wished them away.

None of the young party liked to sit still, and Lady Melusina proposed a quadrille, which was carried with acclamation, but had well nigh failed for want of numbers.

There were but seven ; and of these, Miss Sycamore said she would act as band at the pianoforte, which would reduce them to six.

However, Lady Melusina, full of resource, soon had a remedy. The groom of the chambers was excellent at a quadrille on the violin, and she asked, and obtained leave of, Lady Langston, to send for Mr. Trippett to tea. It was but just across the garden, and he might bring his pumps in his pocket ; and as he always obeyed Lady Melusina's commands, and was really not a little proud to be thought of consequence on these occasions, he was sure to come.

All this was wonderful to Robert Sterling, who was in raptures to think that people of such quality, though so young, could be like other young people, and amuse themselves so unfastidiously.

All succeeded. Mr. Trippett brought his pumps, and the groom of the chambers his

fiddle. The Honourable Mr. Trelawney gave great hopes of future eminence in knowledge of the world, by saying of Trippett, after he was gone, that he was just the sort of fellow to hand ladies cups at tea, and get a bit of cake himself after it was done. Whether Lady Euphrasia was struck with him we know not ; but she seemed to choose him for her partner with some eagerness, though probably to provide herself an answer against the application of Mr. Trippett.

This being settled, Lord Langston could do no less than take Miss Trelawney. Mr. Trippett looked most wistfully at Lady Melusina ; but she said Miss Sycamore could show him the figure better ; and thus Robert Sterling became a partner in the dance, not only of the lady of his love, but a beautiful lady, a court lady, and a lady, as uncle George had said, at the very tip-top of fashion.

Let us, however, do him justice. Though his fondest ambition was gratified, ambition was not the feeling that was most pleased. Of all the attractions of Lady Melusina, her title was now become the least. Her beauty, her grace, her unaffectedness, vivacity, and seeming talent, added to a good-breeding, born with her, not

acquired, would have affected the youth as they did, had she been a farmer's daughter : as an earl's sister, the whole was irresistible, and Robert's head was turned.

Who would have thought it three days before ?

But his good fortune did not end here. He was really an excellent dancer ; his time was perfect ; he was quiet ; and from nature and youth, light and graceful. Trippet admired, and tried in vain to imitate him ; and Miss Sycamore in vain wished to change partners.

Lady Trelawney herself complimented him on his dancing, the rather because she knew not who he was, except that she had been told he had gained the university prize, and that his father was Sir Robert Sterling, and had a seat in the county of Surrey ; but she went farther, and said that he was like the royal family.

Robert went to bed, in love with his situation, a little in love with Lady Trelawney, and a great deal with Lady Melusina.

In the walk before breakfast the next morning, chance threw him alone with Miss Sycamore, who, from the figure he had hitherto made, which she said was an interesting compound of accomplishments and shyness, had taken him into her

good graces ; and, seeing his total inexperience among scenes and persons such as he was at present witnessing, resolved to bestow a little of her own knowledge upon him.

Upon his expressing his happiness, therefore, in the friendship of Lord Langston, and the opportunity it gave him of knowing such very amiable people, and receiving such proofs of affability from Lady Trelawney, to whom he was so entirely a stranger, as well as the countess, who might show it for her son's sake,—

“ Why, yes,” said Miss Sycamore, “ it is all very well ; and you young men, not yet *au fait* as to the manners of the world, particularly the great world, would perhaps do harm to your stock of happiness if you marred your expectations with rash suspicions, which might, perhaps, after all, be unfounded. But, I suppose, though so young and inexperienced in society, you do not expect to find always, and out of the drawing-room, the manner and conciliation which so please you within.”

Robert expressed surprise at the observation, and said that he thought Lord Langston, and the countess, and the two young ladies, would never change.

“ Change ! no ; Heaven forbid ! ” replied Miss

Sycamore. "My Lord is all nature and honesty, and the countess is too really high-souled to have two characters ; and as for the young ladies—"

"Ay !" observed Robert, "they seem to be nature and goodness, as well as elegance, themselves. Lady Melusina, for example."

"You cannot praise her too much."

"And Lady Euphrasia ?"

"She, too, is excellent in her way."

"In her way ! What does that mean ?"

"Oh ! only that it is different from her sister's. Yet her sense of what high rank and station require is no more than her own justify ; and it would perhaps be well if many hoydens of quality resembled her."

"I observed," said Robert, "something that fell from her, about *faute de mieux*."

Miss Sycamore smiled.

Robert then turned to the civilities of Lady Trelawney.

"Here," said Miss Sycamore, "let me caution you ; nor compromise me for doing so. But I have seen your elation at her compliments, which may or may not be owing to the great deference for the countess, and the court she thinks it right to pay to her."

"Court !" observed Robert. "A woman of

her high station and lead in the world, herself a viscountess, pay court to any one !”

Miss Sycamore again smiled, and said he had a great deal to learn. She then informed him, that high and powerful as many supposed leaders in society appeared, their power was not always real or self-derived, but depended often upon a reflection from others ; that the countess was really so high in herself, as to be perfectly independent ; while others, though nominally in the same class, only revolved round her, and were not sorry to add to their own light, by borrowing a little of her’s.”

Robert stared, and Miss Sycamore went on to say, that with all her grandeur, Lady Trelawney, especially when in proximity with the countess, felt, spite of herself, that there was an original defect in her pretensions to the highest place in the temple of fashion, and that by some of the legitimate sovereigns she was even considered as *parvenue* ; that she herself was a mere co-heiress of a nabob, whom nobody knew out of India ; and that her husband, who had enobled her, had been himself the first peer of his family, his grandfather having been deep in the iniquity of the South Sea Scheme:

“ Hence,” concluded Miss Sycamore, “ she

stands in need of all the alliances she can make with real old nobility, to confirm herself in the rank she affects in the lead of fashion. She has even sometimes her mortifications as well as others, and is equally jealous with her inferiors, to keep herself uncontaminated with any thing plebeian. However," added Miss Sycamore, "do not let this discourage you; for your own sake, as well as from seeing you the friend of Lord Langston, I have no doubt she is sincere in her civilities."

"And the son and daughter?"

"You see what they are. The girl not yet spoiled; the boy in a fair way of being so."

Robert thanked his informant heartily for being so much interested about him, and said he should remember her lesson; after which, finding both Lady Trelawney, and her son and daughter, more and more condescending, as the favour of Lord Langston seemed to increase, he began to doubt the accuracy of Miss Sycamore's account, and gave himself up, without any alloy, to the good fortune that seemed to court him.

And so passed some happy days. But the brightest sun may be overcast, and a cloud now lowered—at a distance, indeed, but which foreboded a storm. That terrible, though so despi-

cable Tylney, with his insolence of birth, and other adventitious advantages of fortune and connexions, seemed born always to cross our scion of St. Swithin's or of Bloomsbury, and throw him into shade; and though confessedly his inferior in all accomplishments of mind, and even in dancing (as all the ladies of Langston afterwards pronounced)—though he cared not for the nightingale, still less could quote Spencer, and was, like Portia's Neapolitan prince, “a colt, indeed, who could do nothing but talk of his horse;” still the appellation of Honourable, his heirdom to a peerage and ten thousand a-year, and his connexion in blood with a duchess, added, as we have said, to an impenetrable self-complacency, and most provoking coolness of look and manner, always got the better of Robert's firmness, and disconcerted and defeated him whenever they met.

Account for this, ye moralists and philosophers, ye Republicans and Utilitarians, if you can!

Robert Sterling had as much natural bravery as any other young man. He had not the sturdy decision of his friend Wilson, which would have knocked Tylney down had he looked saucily at him; but he would risk any thing in assertion

of his honour, provided all forms of honour were fulfilled. It was moral courage in which he was deficient. He had too many sensibilities, too many refinements to satisfy. He could willingly have shot Tylney, if affronted by him; but then he would only have shot, not mortified him; and without mortifying him, as he had himself been mortified, the revenge would not have been complete. Even if he killed him in the *duello*, he felt that the *haute noblesse* would have sided against, not for him, and lamented that a man of such fashion should have fallen by the hand of a mere *bourgeois*.*

* It was this sort of insolence of caste which contributed to the French Revolution. Injuries may be forgiven: insult never. His own vanity is quite as much concerned in the affronted as the affronter.—I have heard a story of a *petit maître* of quality, in the *petit maître* days of Paris, which affords an useful lesson. In those days of triumph to the chivalrous coxcombs of the court over the *roturiers*, it had, by an exquisite refinement of insolence, become a fashion with young *mousquetaires*, and others, to go to the theatres with bottles of phosphorus, and wherever a fine flaxen peruke, then often worn by the *bons bourgeois*, appeared, the bottle was emptied and the wig set on fire. However laughed at, such was the demarcation between *noblesse* and *bourgeois*, that the latter could get no redress. Once, however, on the thing's happening, the affronted
pursued

Settle this with human nature as we may, it was certain, that owing to the weakness we have described in our hero, his genius succumbed before the no genius of Tylney,—as he now, spite of all his resistance, began to feel.

pursued the affronter with such perseverance, and threatened such manual chastisement, that the latter, against the remonstrances of his brethren in insolence, consented to a meeting. They fought with swords, and the insulter was carried off disabled. His progress was watched by the insulted, and as soon as he was recovered he was called out again. The same fate attended him, only he was worse wounded, and he took six months to recover his strength. He was then ordered to his regiment at Toulouse, but was pursued by his enemy, who presented himself at the mess door, and motioned him to come out. The officers interfered; the colonel examined the story, and the result was, that though the insulter had done wrong in consenting to satisfaction in the first instance, yet having done so, and waived his privilege, he was bound to go on.

A question was asked, whether enough had not been done? The answer was, no; unless the *mousquetaire* would submit to have his hair burnt off by the *bourgeois*. This was refused, and they instantly prepared for the combat. The colonel asked if the *monsieur* had no second? "My second is my cause!" answered he: "but you are all of you men of honour." Many of the officers exclaimed "Bravo!" The duel then began, and the insulter was killed. Twice severely wounded, and once
killed,

Four days of elysium had passed, during which Robert not only had danced, but sung with Miss Trelawney; and he was in such favour with the viscountess, that she desired the acquaintance might not cease, and gave him her address in Grosvenor Street. On the fifth a letter was received by Lord Langston from Tylney, telling him, if he pleased, he would take him on his way to Weymouth, to pass a few days, agreeably to frequent invitation. This news, which seemed to please the ladies of the party, particularly Lady Euphrasia (though she gave no reason for it, except that he was so well-bred, and quizzed people so coolly), deprived Sterling of his breakfast; he turned pale, said he had a head-ache, and lost all his vivacity: nobody knew why. He, too, had had a letter. They hoped no bad news; he shook his head: said his mother was ill (which was true), and that he feared he ought not to trespass any longer; that he never should forget that he had never lived till now; and that it would be quite a regale to

killed, one would think was revenge enough; but the *bourgeois* said, it would have been much sweeter if he could have singed the insulter's whiskers,—without which his revenge was not complete, nor the affront wiped out. Just so was the feeling of Robert towards Tylney.

his memory to hear of their welfare. These, and a thousand *et cæteras* of the same sort, escaped from the mortified Robert, who took the sudden resolution, by hastening his departure, to avoid a rencontre in which he knew he could by no means command himself. The very commendations of his rival, if so he could be called, which were poured out by the ladies, even by Lady Melusina, were wormwood and aloes to him ; nor was Lady Trelawney more bearable, when she declared, in a stately manner, that the Tylneys had always shewn blood, and had been declared by the queen among the best-bred persons of the court.

Langston, assenting generally to the breeding of the family, expressed a fear that this branch of it was in danger of being spoilt : he was such a coxcomb.

"And what very young man of fashion is not ?" asked Lady Euphrasia ; "His being spoilt shows that he must have merit !"

"I have heard," said Miss Sycamore, who was always privileged to give her opinion, "that, considering his education, he is terribly illiterate."

"No matter," observed his defender ; "he is not the less at his ease, or less able to keep others at a distance."

All this told to the very heart of Robert. He never thought Lady Euphrasia so agreeable as her sister, but he now thought her positively disagreeable. Lady Trelawney's favour too sank to nothing ; and he perfectly hated her son, who said, in a familiar way, he liked Tylney, for he made such good fun of people.

" I see I have no business here," said Robert to himself, and he resolved to get away as soon as he could.

Lord Langston in vain attempted to alter his resolution, and even the ladies said civil things, but all in vain. As a last resource, Lord Langston said to him in his own room while packing up: " I know your jealousy of Tylney, and see your motive. You must not mind what Euphrasia says, because she is flattered that she is the only person he ever dances with. Stay—assert yourself—and you will get over this foolish foible of yours. To name Tylney with you would be ridiculous."

Even this could not dissipate the alarm with which the mere fear of the mention of the " Dutch gentleman," or the " Knight of St. Swithin's," though to be uttered of course in his absence, had begun to give him. In short, spite of the remon-

strances of his noble friend, a chaise was ordered, and, after a respectful leave-taking, he was off, to brood over himself and the mockeries of his fortune, in banishment from what had to him been nothing less than Paradise.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. STERLING IS DISGUSTED.

"Society is no comfort to one not sociable."

Cymbeline.

It cannot be supposed that Robert had kept his parents ignorant of all that had been passing in the last eventful days. On the contrary, he had given his mother a glowing and florid description of all that had befallen him, from his leaving Oxford with Lord Langston, to the time he quitted the castle; with all the beautiful episodes of dining, dancing, walking, riding, and reading, and all that gentlemen and ladies of high degree looked, or did, or said; and of a truth the account was devoured voraciously by Lady Sterling, and tasted, certainly not without relish, by Sir Robert.

The departure from the castle was now announced, but not the cause of it, and it was quite sufficient that it was voluntary on his part, and

opposed on that of Lord Langston. "The boy is quite right," said Sir Robert. "I never knew good come of a visit where the departure was not opposed by a request to stay. Bob begins to show some knowledge of the world, and that his father was born before him."

"He tells us he will be with us directly," said Lady Sterling; "and yet I wonder how he could leave that Lady Melusina and that good lord, and asked to stay too!"

"Quite right, quite right, I tell you, my good lady; and had he asked my advice I could only have told him to do so. Well, he deserves something for his prize, though he has disappointed me about Amsterdam."

Soon after this the subject of discussion drove up to the door in a post-chaise.

"He might, though, have come by the coach," exclaimed Sir Robert. "Coaches now-a-days are even better than postchaises. But when a man gets a prize from a whole University, something may be allowed for forgetfulness."

"I think so," said Lady Sterling, running down stairs to meet her son.

Robert was received by his father with a hearty welcome, and compliments upon his academical honours, to which the old gentleman was

by no means insensible ; and by his mother with tears of joy, flowing perhaps from a different source. For (we must not conceal it) the good lady was in perfect rapture to think of the progress he seemed to have made at Langston Castle. Four whole days' visit, all marked with civility, to say nothing of having rode out in the daytime with Lady Melusina and Lady Euphrasia, and danced with them in the evening in the family party ! To be sure, the curate had danced also ; but then it was *faute de mieux* ; and, besides, *he* danced only with the governess, to make up the set.

The first days after his arrival all was gaiety, and indeed happiness, in the Square. Sir Robert gave a dinner in honour of his son, and invited two of the City members and their wives, both of them ladies, to greet him. His mother did more ; for thinking even these rather too homely, and indeed not young enough, and having often heard that the life and soul of a party was to be well *assortie*, she prevailed upon two judges' wives, her neighbours, to come in the evening with their young ladies, to make merry, she said, and have a little hop.

The very thought, however, when she mentioned it, turned Robert sick ; and uncle George,

who was upon this occasion consulted on the selection, looked contempt which he could ill conceal, though Sir Robert was present, and very much approved of Lady Sterling's good old-fashioned intention.

The young, pretty, and natural Caroline, then only just turned fifteen, was to be admitted to the party ; and both the knight and Lady Sterling anticipated all the pleasure which the preparation for it seemed to promise.

But vain are the hopes of man. The dinner and the dance took place ; but Robert, for whom it was planned, was out of spirits. He said he was ill, which surprised his father, for he had been riding in the park the whole day ; and Sir Robert could not comprehend why a man who had gained an university prize, and danced with an earl's daughters, did not join, or not join better, in conversation with the two aldermen, who understood corporation politics so well ; or show more alacrity in dancing with their daughters, who were young and blooming.

Uncle George, indeed, explained that alacrity in dancing, whether in ladies or gentlemen, was very *mauvais ton*, and that at court they appeared to dance in their sleep.

“ Ah ! that was not so in my time,” exclaimed

the knight, "nor was it in yours, brother, at the little Christmas hops we used to give in Swithin's Lane."

Uncle George looked petrified; and though the party was not exactly such as made him very much afraid of his reputation, he cast rather an anxious glance around, to see who were within earshot; and observing one of the law ladies, who lived in Spring Gardens, to smile, he turned away, evidently annoyed. Robert was scarcely less so, and drooped, no one knew why, the whole evening.

The young ladies "of the Square" thought him fine, and he heard one say to another it was too ridiculous. This gave him no disturbance, for he was thinking of Langston Castle, and these damsels of equivocal fashion could bear no comparison with those thorough-bred females—the ladies of that consecrated ground. Even Miss Sycamore was wronged by a comparison with the *ladies of the Square*.

The evening, as well as the dinner, was a failure; which puzzled Sir Robert, as he said he had spared no expense—a remark which did not add to the complacency of his son, any more than the sad solecism which the senior Sterling committed, in sitting with his Barcelona hand-

kerchief spread over his new satin thirds, while he poured out his tea into the saucer, and devoured no inconsiderable quantity of bread and butter.

Most of the young men, too, were the "sort of fellows who hand ladies tea-cups, and get a bit of cake themselves;" to all which the remembrance of the observations at Langston Castle made him uncomfortably alive. He, therefore, was little happy in the entertainment made for him; and when, the next morning, both his father and mother told him he ought to go and call upon his partners, he looked astounded, and, to their dismay, absolutely refused.

"The devil's in the boy," said Sir Robert, talking it over with his wife. "This prize has absolutely turned his head, or bewildered his faculties, which I rather thought it would have sharpened."

Lady Sterling shook her head, but did not give her opinion, though she was nearer the mark.

Poor Sir Robert began to grieve for his son. Instead of adding to the mirth and merriment of the house, which his visit after so long an absence taught them to expect, this hope of the family grew dull and listless, if not sullen.

Nothing seemed to please him. Like Richard, he had "no delight to pass away the time." Certainly he had none in the men of business who came often to his father; still less in the females who visited his mother.

If he was interested at all, it was with the cheerful Caroline, who, Heaven knows, had no care but to make herself and others happy—in which she succeeded with all but her brother.

He sometimes, indeed, pleased himself with giving her little literary lessons, in which she delighted; and sometimes condescended to walk with her within the rails of the Square. But then it was not Grosvenor Square—the difference between which and plebeian Bloomsbury, he sighed to think of.

All this had an effect upon him for which few could account. Instead of assisting in doing the honours of the house to those who frequented it, he fled them as if they had an infectious disease. His life, even at home, became solitary; he saw none of his relations but at meals, and for the greatest part of the day was bolted in his chamber.

As his father placed this to the account of the love of study, he did not quarrel with it; and his mother only regretted that the hope she had indulged of showing off the accomplishments of

her son to a very numerous, but very ordinary, acquaintance, should be so completely disappointed. Robert, therefore, as far as parental interference was concerned, was kept to himself; and he led a listless life, except in those hours which he gave to the Park, where he had, at least, a chance of meeting those he liked better, though only to look at, than the companions provided for him at home. Even uncle George had very little, at this time, of his company: for since the slighting things that passed about "gentlemen ushers" at Langston Castle, he felt not the pride he formerly did in his courtly relation. He began to doubt his authority on many points relating to fashion, and even as to his fashionable acquaintance. He certainly discovered that it was much more slender than he had thought it, and that to be the nephew of a gentleman usher was by no means a distinction of which to be proud. Nay, he began to agree with his observing friend Wilson, that to be the son of Sir Robert Sterling the merchant, though he lived in Bloomsbury, was much the most respectable of the two.

This was a step gained towards common sense, but by no means towards happiness. His ideas were above himself, above his parents, above

their occupations and interests, and a great deal above the circle in which they moved. To break out of this circle, was as great a struggle to him, and as great an object to accomplish, as if he had been spell-bound by the wand of an enchanter ; nor did he see at all at present how the spell could be broken.

The effect was melancholy upon himself and his family, to whose natural disposition to cheerfulness he little contributed, if he did not repress it. His father's friends, who came, as they said, sometimes to take pot-luck, gave him a fit of the spleen, and drove him to his room ; or, if the evening was without company, he would sit silent and abstracted, and only relieved when his parents got to their cribbage, and he was allowed to dream away the hours over a book, or his own thoughts, till a very early bed-time.

In a word, the visit to Langston Castle, though it had not *generated* his infatuation for finer people than he found among his good relations, that is, in his own sphere, yet had it added so much to it, that his otherwise good mind was cankered, and though alive to the real worth of his father, and the tenderness of his mother, their little homelinesses, and total

want of the conventional forms of high breeding, made him shrink from them with a dislike, for which he severely blamed himself, but could not prevent it.

Wilson was the only one of his own sphere whom he found he could tolerate; his want of fashion and blunt manners being outweighed by his attachment and fidelity to him amid many rebuffs. Others were as worthy, but they were not early friends, and there was no occasion, as Robert thought, if he had to seek new acquaintance, that he should search for them among families as little distinguished as his own.

In this dilemma, chance brought him in contact with his quondam tutor, Mr. Barker, who, as we have said, had a sister married to a baronet in Green Street, and whom, with others, the holidays had brought to town. He had sincerely rejoiced in Robert's academical success, —taking, as was not unnatural, a good deal of it to himself.

“By the way,” said he, after the first questions were over, “my sister, Lady Webly, has a squeeze, or something of that sort, to-night, and, if you will allow me, I will mention your name to her, as one of her guests.”

The first impulse of the changed pupil was to

make a face at the word squeeze. The next to ponder what might be expected from a rout in Green Street, which had been unmercifully stigmatized by Lady Euphrasia, when quizzing her brother for his low tastes. However, as Green Street was incomparably more west than Bloomsbury Square, and therefore he hoped out of the reach of the aspirants of the bar and the counting-house, he accepted the invitation.

His mother, when he told it her, approved, saying she believed Lady Webly was vastly genteel; and, to guess from the fashionable papers, saw none but the best company. "And yet," said Sir Robert, rather gruffly, "I remember Sir William before he was an army contractor, when he was not sorry to walk home with me from Change, and take a bit of mutton in Swithin's Lane."

The very name of that odious place called all the colour into Robert's cheeks. However, he resolved to go; and go he did; calling for Mr. Barker at Mivart's in the way.

At first his spirits were high at seeing the blockade of carriages which, in a long line, filled the street. For though the London season, as it was called, was said to be at an end (the first week in July), there was still left enough

of the high *monde* to fill, and even overflow, any single reasonable ball or assembly that could have been held.

"She must, indeed," said Robert to himself, "have an immense, if not a very fashionable acquaintance, and Green Street cannot be so bad as Lady Euphrasia made it out."

His hopes, however, were abated, when he found that by very far the majority of the carriages he had seen were proceeding to Grosvenor Square, where the lady of a great foreign minister held an assembly of the very first character for *haute noblesse*. This rather lowered his expectations; which were not regenerated when he entered a hall almost denuded of footmen; saw an inner room denuded of cloaks; and, on mounting the stairs, was met by straggling parties, seemingly in a great hurry to get away, although it was not quite midnight.

The *salon de compagnie*, on his entering it, seemed quite forlorn. It was well furnished, well lighted, and a perfect temple of Flora; but without a priestess. Certainly Lady Webby, though she had that day been to court, and had retained her diamonds and feathers, had not that character, any more than some eight or ten other females (positively no more), who,

scattered upon different sofas, made the empty space seem greater than it was. These were composed of three or four Indians, West and East ; a *millionaire* and his wife, who had come, however, from Cavendish Square ; and two bishops' ladies. Two " others apart sat on a couch retired ;" for they seemed to know no one but one another, though the lady of the mansion was most particularly deferential and attentive to them. These were virgins of a certain age, daughters and sisters of peers, and, from the rich style of their dress, the rubies and diamonds on their fingers, and their quantity of valuable laces, persons of fortune as well as of birth. They seemed very conscious of their dignified superiority, and, though alone, were not in the least disconcerted on that account ; on the contrary, their glasses were ever at their eyes, criticising the dress, looks, and manners, of their fellow-guests. In particular, they seemed struck with the birds of Paradise which two of the Indian ladies wore on their heads, at which they interchanged smiles of something like contempt ; and one was heard by Robert, (who, from knowing no one, had ensconced himself behind their sofa,) to observe to the other in a low tone of voice, " what a mistake !—quite gone by !—

but no wonder!"—At which they renewed their silent and imperturbable observation.

At length, though Miss Webly was at the piano-forte, and had just began a cantata, with her master, Signor Pistruzzi, one of them said, almost loud enough to be heard by more than Sterling, "do you think we have staid long enough? shall we go?" At this they both got up, and curtseying hastily to Lady Webly, who was occupied with her daughter's music, escaped, spite of her eagerness to intercept them, and the sound of "To the Austrian ambassadress's," was heard at the door, as they rolled off.

This was a signal to one of the bird of Paradise ladies, who seemed to have been hitherto rebuked by their superior genius, or superior rank (no matter which), and who could not help greeting Lady Webly with a "Well! I never knew any thing so ill bred; and just too as Miss Webly was going to delight us. But it is, indeed, unfortunate that this German princess should have fixed exactly on your night, Lady Webly, to give her last *soirée*."

"It is particularly provoking," answered Lady Webly, "on a court-day, too, when so many of my friends, whom I met at the

drawing-room, promised to be here in their full costume, which made me keep on mine; and now not one of them has been here but old Lady Ashford; and even she, perhaps, would not, had she visited the ambassadress. But, come, do not let us interrupt the music."

At this, all the party, now indeed greatly reduced, drew near the instrument, and Miss Webly was about to begin again, when Signor Pistruzzi was observed to turn pale, as he looked through the first rank that encircled him, and saw no others behind. He said something in Italian to Miss Webly, which that young lady did not well understand, and the rest of the company not at all, and then suddenly declared he was very ill,—a sudden pain in the side,—it was impossible for him to sing,—and he must seek a *fiacre*, and go home.

To do them justice, both Lady Webly and her daughter carried it off very well, and proposed going into the refreshment-room, as there was nothing better. This was a small conservatory, in which, instead of the dews of heaven, ices and lemonades, and *ponche à la Romaine*, seemed to flow from the urns of six most attentive nymphs, clothed in white, and of very pretty features and address; one or two,

the *soubrettes* of Lady Webly, the rest of the magician Negri.

The worst of it was, that the £100, which it cost, was totally thrown away ; for it is obvious that the entertainment we have described was a *partie manquée*.

The effect of all this upon Robert could not be well defined. He undoubtedly felt that what he had witnessed was very different from what he had ever seen at home, or in its immediate neighbourhood ; and yet, inexperienced as he was, his eye, or his tact, informed him that neither Lady Webly, nor any of her guests, were in their exact element. Then this cruel German princess, who, without ever having heard of Lady Webly, much less of the army contractor, her husband, though a baronet—and who, by merely existing, had extinguished glories which for the previous month had been fondly anticipated !—Who, or what could she be ? From what regions had she dropped ? When and where had she lived, that thus, till yesterday known only in a foreign land, she should now be able to influence the whole *noblesse*, real, and would-be, of London ?

These were questions that would have baffled, perhaps, a more experienced intellect than that

of our Oxford tyro. They certainly baffled Mr. Barker's, *genteel* as he was held in Northamptonshire, and by all Robert's relations. All he could say was, that his sister was cruelly disappointed, but that, with their fortune, it did not signify.

Robert's sagacity showed him that the expense was the least part of the matter ; and he felt no little indignation when he thought of the affronting superciliousness of the two Honourables, who had let out their sentiments so unguardedly, in respect to the party they had condescended to attend. It administered food to his malady of jealousy, which required no aliment to keep it alive.

As they passed through Grosvenor Square, too, and he saw the great house of the redoubtable ambassadress in a blaze of light, with seemingly hundreds of coronetted coaches, setting down what appeared divinities, waving with plumes and blazing with diamonds, which had that day visited the court, a new world opened upon him, and not a happy one. He fell into a dream of splendid notions, such as he had never before experienced ; but thought with emotion of the superior lot of those to whom such scenes were familiar, and at the same time with envy, and

even indignation, that he should be excluded from them.

In proportion to his sensibility to this, was his wonder that his tutor, whose tastes and ambition were of a very different sort, who had arrived only that morning from Northamptonshire, and whose bed-time had been past near four hours, was asleep, and snoring by his side, when he stopped at Mivart's, to set him down.

The next morning, at breakfast, he was more *distract* than ever. The atmosphere was gloomy, even at that time of year ; and he observed, that Grosvenor Square, he thought, being higher, must be a great deal more healthy than Bloomsbury Square.

"What," said Sir Robert, shrewdly, "has Green Street so bit you, that you do not relish your home?"

"No, indeed, Sir," replied the youth ; "neither Green Street, nor any thing I saw in it, gave me a thought."

"And who did you see?" asked Lady Sterling.

"Nobody worth remembering."

"I thought Mr. Barker said there were to be Mrs. Loader from Cavendish Square, and

I don't know how many nabobs?" added Sir Robert.

"There was scarcely any body," returned young Sterling; "nobody whatever of note, except two old ladies of quality, who stared all the rest out of countenance."

"They must have been of quality, indeed," observed the senior Sterling, rather chuckling: "but who were they? I suppose you were introduced?"

"That is not the custom at these places," replied Robert.

"That is very extraordinary, not to say unfriendly," rejoined the knight. "I thought all in the same house knew one another, of course."

"No more than in the same college," answered Robert, with some spleen.

"But who were the staring ladies?"

"I understood, after they were gone, that they were the Honourable Mrs. Vernon and the Honourable Mrs. Throgmorton."

"Both married, then?"

* Could we suspect the knight of reading plays, we might think he was alluding to *Ranger*, when he first meets *Clarinda*: "She must be a woman of quality, by her staring."

“ Old maids,” said Robert, “ but highly connected.”

“ Whew—w !” cried his father, “ you need not have left our neighbourhood for old maids ! Plenty of them here, and indeed every where—they roost all about us.”

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE NEW ADVENTURE THAT BEFEL MR.
STERLING, AND ITS EFFECT UPON HIS HEART
AND MIND.

“ I cannot tell

What Heav'n hath giv'n him ; let some graver eye
Pierce into that ; but I can see his pride
Peep through each part of him.”

Henry VIII.

A LITTLE comfort now dawned upon our fastidious, yet aspiring hero. Riding in the Park, he met a travelling landau, driving as fast as four post-horses could draw it. Arms, supporters, and a viscount's coronet on the panels ; imperials on the top ; a young gentleman on the box ; and, behind, a chaise, with a gentleman's gentleman, and a very elegant *soubrette*, evidently the suite of the favoured people in the landau.

It was the Lady Trelawney and her son and daughter, who, having finished their visit at Langston, were now coming to finish the cam-

paign in London, or perhaps passing through on some other excursion.

Robert's heart beat high at the sight of what recalled to his remembrance the only paradise he had known ; though little was necessary for this purpose, since he thought of it every hour of the day. But here were beings whom he had associated with on the very spot ; who had left those he so admired, perhaps only a few hours ; who were identified with them, and whose mere appearance, therefore, filled him with joy.

Besides, he had been particularly noticed, nay, almost favoured, by Lady Trelawney ; had danced and sung with the young lady ; and had been told not to let the acquaintance drop.

Could any thing be more propitious to revive his drooping spirits, and make him forget the ordinary people with whom he had lately been surrounded ? They lived in Grosvenor Street, and he would call the next day.

That night he could not sleep for thinking of it ; and he wished it the more, because it was evident, from their countenances, that young Trelawney, if not the two ladies, knew him ; and the servant out of livery, in the chaise behind, actually smiled, and touched his hat to him.

Well, the morning came, and with it came

hope, and confidence, and joyful expectation. He had been told that nobody, that is, nobody of any consequence, made early morning calls—it was so like mere business; he would wait, therefore, till full two o'clock. His father said they would be all out, and advised twelve. Fortunately, he recollected that at Langston he had heard that nobody ever visited before two or three; because, otherwise, people were sure to be at home. He thought the reason odd; however, he resolved to wait till two, and his heart beat rather high when he knocked at the door in Grosvenor Street.

It was opened by a very fat porter, in a full dress coat and waistcoat, with long flaps; the skirts and seams of both of which were trimmed with livery lace. On asking for Lady Trelawney, Cerberus professed absolute ignorance, but rang a bell, which was answered, first by a footman, then by Robert's friend, the groom of the chambers, who had saluted him in the Park; so he thought himself sure. But the groom of the chambers did not smile, as he had done the day before. On the contrary, he shook his head, said my lady had not yet come out of her room, and that the young gentleman and lady had just then walked out, but he would deliver his card.

Robert pulled out his case with a disappointed air, and while feeling for the card, plainly perceived Miss Trelawney gliding along the landing-place of the first story up stairs. From a door, also half open, he heard a laugh, which he felt sure was that of her brother, though both brother and sister had just then walked out.

He had no help for it but to leave the hall, which he did in something like anger, though he checked himself by thinking (not a very usual piece of candour with him) that as they could not possibly know who it was that called, the denial could not have been pointed at him; and if at all the world, no express affront was intended.

This consoled him during two whole turns which he made round Grosvenor Square, while endeavouring to unravel a problem which occupied him to his bitter annoyance. Such was the nature of our philosophic young gentleman.

But his negative satisfaction was again almost instantly done away with, when he came to recollect the precise part of the gallery in which he had seen Miss Trelawney, and the open door from which her brother's laugh had issued. "Both *must* have seen me," said he; "and if so, what a picture of the fine world!" The

thought distressed him; and he hurried he knew not where, and wandered for an hour, completely absorbed by this profound and painful disquisition.

He had obtained no satisfaction, when, as chance would have it, he perceived, waiting to be put down at a shop-door in Pall Mall, the very identical persons who had so engaged and so embarrassed his thoughts. They were in an open barouche; Lady Trelawney seated by herself forwards, and her son and daughter on the opposite side. As there was a stop among the carriages, and the barouche was drawn up to the pavement, and moreover Miss Trelawney (whom we called, and not unfairly, a frank girl, yet unspoilt) showed some pleasure in seeing him again, it was impossible not to stop to pay his devoirs and make inquiries. He also joyfully acquitted her of the crime he had fastened upon her, of having seen him when he called in Grosvenor Street.

But, sad to say, the alacrity she exhibited on his addressing her alarmed her lady mother, who instantly made her quit her seat, which was next the pavement, and come over to the vacant cushion beside the old lady, who thus cut her off from even seeing the person whose advance

she was disposed so impolitically to encourage. The demeanour both of mother and son were very different from the daughter's. Lady Trelawney was coldness itself, and said she had supposed that by this time he had been at Amsterdam.

A thunder-clap could not have roused him more ; he reddened, and seeing young Trelawney in an incipient laugh, he begged to know how such a thing came to be imagined ?

"Oh !" said Trelawney, "Tylney told us all about it after he came, and said they called you the Dutch gentleman at — College!"

The young insolent then turned his head another way, and Lady Trelawney, saying they had business in the shop, begged he would not trouble himself to offer his arm, for which he seemed preparing, as her son always helped her. With this she quitted the carriage, leaving him in a fit of amazement such as he never had felt, and from which he was a very long time indeed before he recovered.

His situation was almost amusingly painful, at least to any other but himself. He found himself in the park, without knowing how he got there. He rubbed his eyes, pinched his arms, and asked himself if he was awake? A

confused dream seemed to haunt him, in which there was a jumble of things, sensations, and persons—Langston Castle enchantment, and Tylney in the shape of an immense bear, breaking it all to pieces.

He walked first quick, and then slow, and the trouble of his countenance challenged all the passers-by. Certainly, if there had ever been a cut, cool, determined, ungracious, and even insulting, it was this; and yet the difficulty to understand or account for it made it still more cruel. It was the more disappointing, because the apparent first disposition of Miss Trelawney had delighted him, and he was overjoyed to think he had been in an error about her. Why her mother so instantly and decidedly repressed her good-nature, gravelled him. Why that mother herself had so changed, she—who had invited him to her house, and compared him to the royal family—she, who had praised his reading, his dancing, his music, and hoped the acquaintance would not cease! Who could explain it? He would have forgiven it in the girl; but for an old woman to be fine, capricious, contemptuous!—the thing was beyond imagination.

One conclusion he at last came to: that he would

never trust an old woman of quality again ; and that he would take the first opportunity of trouncing her jackanapes of a son. As for Tylney, who had been opened to view, he resolved to pursue the scent, and if he found, as he expected, that he had occasioned this unhappy *contretemps*, he again resolved that he would not quit him till he had had a gentleman's revenge.

With these consolations he began slowly to recover, so far, at least, as to wander towards home ; in doing which we do not know whether he was or was not relieved, by meeting his friend Wilson.

That unsophisticated, straight-forward person had only just arrived from Oxford for the long vacation, having been forced, by some college rules, to return to St. John's till now. His sedate, but cheerful open countenance, his unclouded brow, and firm step, betokened a man neither dazzled nor disgusted with the world, but observing every thing, infatuated with nothing, enjoying what he could, and not in a rage because he could not enjoy more. Sterling never envied nor wanted him so much.

“ I have used you ill,” said he. “ I broke my promise of writing to you an account of my visit to Langston.”

"I was eager to know it," replied Wilson.
"Did you return your own man?"

"Probe me not too deeply," returned Sterling;
"few could venture upon the fascinations of that
enchancing place, and come off whole. I would
have informed you of them, however, but for—"

"What?" asked Wilson.

"You were too good a prophet."

"What, you met some of the Tylneys?"

"Many : not positively met them, for, to my
shame, I left the field; but they came, and
have done me more damage than I like to con-
fess; certainly more than I mean to put up
with."

He said this in so agitated, and, at the same
time, so decided a tone, that Wilson felt obliged
to make a point of knowing all his griefs. He
detailed them with great fidelity, and finally
demanded of his friend, whether he could now
advise him, as he did before, to submit to these
injuries, and by submitting, encourage their
repetition.

"I would not do so," said Wilson, thought-
fully, "were the matter ripe enough to interfere
as you propose; for I suppose you mean no less
than to call out Mr. Tylney?"

“ I do !”

“ Then you are prepared with chapter and verse to prove his delinquency ?”

“ It is plain, from what Trelawney threw out, and the consequent behaviour of his silly mother !” said Sterling.

“ You think her silly, then ?”

“ I do !”

“ Shall I tell you my opinion ?

“ I ask it.”

“ *Imprimis*, then : are you prepared to shoot Mr. Tylney, or be shot yourself in the attempt, because he has lowered you with a woman you confess to be silly, and whose favour, therefore, were you ever so high in it, would do you no credit ?

“ *Secundo* : how are you sure even of the fact, much more of the colouring of it ? Your only information is a very loose speech from a very impudent boy as silly as his mother ; and who, probably, could not explain what he meant by saying, ‘ Mr. Tylney told us all about it.’

“ Thirdly : are you prepared to give Mr. Tylney the triumph of knowing, and to publish it yourself to the world, that he has quizzed you out of the good graces of a silly old woman, and made

her cut you, instead of being, as you expected, taken to her arms, and made, as you hoped, a man of fashion?"

"Wilson," cried Sterling, disturbed beyond his bent, "this is too much—you yourself are presuming to quiz. I asked your assistance—your advice, if you will give it—not your reproofs, still less your ridicule."

"My advice you shall have, and welcome," returned Wilson, "and the rather because I never was so clear or so sincere in any counsel I ever gave."

"For God's sake, then, let's have it, for I am on thorns!"

"I would instantly turn my back upon such silly, and by your own account, such unworthy people. What is it that recommends them to you? Not their titles—not their riches! Surely you have a mind above being affected by them? But it is their fashion, from which you feel excluded: and this it is that pains you. Well, no doubt you are able to show the intrinsic superiorities of this great idol, to all the other idols of the world, and gravely prove that it is worth the sacrifice of your ease and independence to acquire it; as if it was some great moral or religious duty, for which we are ordered to risk martyrdom.

No doubt, too, you have, on your part, nothing valuable in the world's eye, which fashionable people would give their ears to obtain, and cannot : reputation for letters, accomplishments, and real good-breeding, far higher than theirs.

“And will you level all these to the ground, because a cub of a boy, ignorant, probably, certainly vulgar in mind, has presumed to show himself a bear ?

“No, no ! assert yourself ! Feel and show that you are made for better things ! I do not bid you not revenge ; but my revenge should be greater than what you contemplate,—which is the common one, in every man's power.

“Go on in your career ; acquire new honours, and make the butterflies shrink into insignificance, when weighed with you in the balance of men's estimation.

“It moves my very spleen to think how poor the noblest of us can be, when such tinsel as Tyhney can for a moment enter into a comparison with the gold of Robert Sterling.”

“All that may be very well in the closet, in retirement,” replied Sterling, “where, out of temptation, we may be out of danger. But place yourself in the midst of the uproar ; can you

rest undisturbed, as if you had no feeling? Behold at this moment (they were now crossing Bond-street) this *embarras* of carriages. Observe the rich display, the beauty, the grace within them; every one moving in a sphere which we seem forbidden even to think of; confined to linsey-wolsey manners, as well as dress; and daring as well to aspire to the moon, as to mix with them; yet with souls to enjoy elegance, both of manner and person, as well as themselves. Confess, does this give you no envy—or, if that is too strong a word, no ambition—to get above your hum-drum lot, and mingle with theirs? You are but right, believe me, in thinking that it is not riches or titles that move me; except as they indicate good company in those who possess them: and good company, I need not tell you, is a positive gain, and to be denied it, a positive loss.

“ We are now trudging home to our homely dinners. Well; I quarrel not with them because they are homely, and I duly value the kind companions whom I love, and who will welcome me. But where shall I find, in addition to the feast of appetite, the ‘feast of reason and the flow of soul,’ which the men and women of note and fashion, whom we see at this instant rolling in

personal elegance to their respective engagements, will certainly find ? They are all on tip-toe of expected enjoyment, from the brilliant conversation of the brilliant characters whom they are about to meet, and permitted by their happier fates to join. They mix with them as equals, while we can only slink into the common comforts of common-place life.

“ Is this or not a grievance which a generous mind may seek to remove and to remedy, and not be blamed for it ? ”

The emphatic manner which accompanied this rhapsody of Sterling moved Wilson ; for he was himself not insensible to the same feeling which was now described by his friend. But his cool judgment saw at once that Robert had departed from his own question, which was the reasonableness of giving to mere fashion the privileges and superiorities which its professors assumed over those whom they impudently thought the profane, and therefore stood aloof from them.

“ I can easily understand,” said Wilson, “ the feelings you describe, as to the superiority of those banquets which have the distinguished, the well-educated, and the elegant, for guests ; and to see them assembling might certainly make me wish to make one. But Heaven forbid that I should

view them with envy, or regard my own lot and companions as destitute of even the same enjoyments. Mind, manners, and education, are, thank God ! not above us, and where these are, I can enjoy them without the supererogation of plate, French cookery, or rich attire,—which seem all the difference between your banquets and mine.

“ But we have wandered from our question, which is merely how it happens that the people you have named have power to annoy you ? Where have they acquired it ? By what convention of society, or what law, do they assume it ? Does any such exist ? Is it from their own innate superiority ? No ! that would puzzle the deepest moralist to prove. What are their weapons ? Wit—learning—science—virtue ! No : they have no more of these than the every-day people we live with. Is it power, then, in the state ? Look at them all, thronging the doors of a minister, or humbling themselves at court, to partake a little sunshine themselves. This terrible Lady Trelawney—whom I, and you too, should call my lady fool—had her own head turned by being a kind of upper menial to another woman—a queen indeed, but still a woman. And this, for what I can see, is what chiefly gives her the moral power she has over you.

“ Shall I ask another question ?—Would this, could this be so, if you did not yourself supply her with arms ? Is it not yourself who lay yourself bare, and court from these gentry wounds which, but for yourself, a giant could not inflict ? This rod then is of your own furnishing. You have armour that might laugh at it, but you throw it off ; you humble yourself before them, and beg, and entreat, and implore that they would do you the honour of flagellating you.”

“ You, at least, flagellate with sufficient vigour,” said Sterling. “ But go on ; I am determined to hear all.”

“ I have done,” answered Wilson, “ and will only ask, why am I not as susceptible of all this as you ? How is it that the Tylneys and Trelawneys of the world might pass by me by thousands, nay, avoid me like the plague, and I not care a farthing whether they did so or not ? I do not know them, nor care to do so. They have, therefore, no power over me : they can only have it by my own consent ; and, saving your presence, I will not be such a fool as to give it.

“ But, you will say, shall a man, my equal, or my inferior, presume to think himself my superior ? I reply—Why not, if he keep it to himself ? We are not disturbed when a madman

does so ; and we must treat coxcombs, male and female, like lunatics. If the exclusive break out, indeed, into open insult, knock him down. But if he confine his usurpation to his own mind, let him see that you value it not ; nay, laugh at him, if there is any thing about him that deserves laughter."

"All very fine," returned Sterling, "and perhaps very true, in the case of such impotent or despicable people as you suppose—persons without worth or merit, or perhaps themselves upstarts : at them I should be the last to take offence, and the first to laugh. But suppose the insulting exclusive a man or woman of real worth, as well as of birth—of really high character and manners !"

"My good friend," interrupted Wilson, "your supposition defeats itself. Real worth and merit, real high character and manners, would never be guilty of what you impute to them ; and nothing so much shows how blinded you are by your ill-founded jealousy as this inconsequence of reasoning."

"I am afraid that is true," said Sterling. "But suppose they *think* disparagingly of you ?"

Wilson laughed, and replied, "O ! if you are

to resent a *thought*, you may have quarrels enough. You may then stand a chance of imitating the glorious Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

‘ Sir, you lie !’

‘ Sir, that cannot be, for I have not spoken a word.’

‘ I beg your pardon, Sir, for a man may think a lie, as well as speak it ; and I say you lie.’ ”

This *finale* to Wilson’s lecture put Robert *almost* into good humour. He was even disposed to laugh ; and shaking hands with his Mentor, whom he called his matter-of-fact friend, said he would go home and think of it.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. STERLING IN RETIREMENT.

“ This lodging likes me better,
Since, I may say, now lie I like a king.”

Henry V.

AND think of it he did, all the rest of the day, and the next day to that, when, to enjoy his own thoughts the better (perhaps to get rid of the contrast between Bloomsbury Square and Grosvenor Street), he went to what his father called his hermitage (Mr. Tylney had called it his *cockney* hermitage), at Lavender Hill.

Hence he was solitary, if not philosophical. There was at least no *citizen* intruder, though a good deal of the city air, which seemed to extend all over Clapham, and all the adjoining commons. As the inhabitants however all kept within their own precincts, and there were many families among them who might be really tolerated in Robert's favourite classes of society, he tried to forget that he was at Lavender Hill.

And here we cannot but do justice to that happiness of disposition which delights in natural and simple pleasures, wherever found, spite of all that our wayward fancies do to spoil them. With all Robert Sterling's nonsense (and we have seen that he had enough of it), his heart was much alive to these pleasures; and whatever his moodiness, whether from disappointed hopes or affronted pride, remove him from the object, and place him where the images and attractions of nature might have play, his artificial miseries were forgotten, and his tranquillity restored. Thus, he never could enter a garden, and give his senses to the beauties of its shrubs and flowers, its retirement, its shade, and its walks—promoting meditation and reflection of the most pleasing kind—but all his cares were soothed. The garden of Lavender Hill, cockney as it was, and extending over not above an acre and a-half of ground, including a small orchard, was yet large enough, and well enough distributed, to afford him always the relief he sought. He was here generally alone, or with only his books, and he confined his person strictly within the paling which shut out this mimic Tivoli from the rest of the world. He was a sort of Vertumnus, or rather old Corycian Senex, and cared not for the towers of CEBALIA,

much less for the "*Fumum, et opes, strepitum-que Romæ.*"

To this spot he now flew, and though it made him blush when he recollected his disingenuousness in having represented it as his father's seat in the county of Surrey, still he hailed it as a known and tried refuge from what had even already appeared to him the worry of the world.

He took a week to recover, and perhaps would not then, if he had expanded himself in the rich neighbourhood that surrounded him—Richmond, Twickenham, Wimbledon—studded with villas of nobility, and the roads infested with riding parties of fashion,—which now, from the remembrance of those flattering ones at Langston, always plunged him into melancholy.

Can we wonder, when we recollect that the image of the sylph he had there seen had never departed from him, and, hopeless as he was, continued to be cherished as a part of his heart? Nor is this surprising, when we consider that her power, personally great, was a thousand times enhanced by the associations of grandeur, elegance, rank, and high birth (all his favourite propensities), which always now accompanied her idea.

His garden, however, contained nothing but

what was soothing. The roses were not capricious, the laburnums always smiled, the shade never refused shelter, or the seats repose.

He felt like a little king. To be sure, his dominions were small ; but he was undisturbed in his sovereignty, and feared no rebellion. In short, from being delivered from rivalry without, he felt at peace within. He had no affronts or exclusiveness, present or expectant, to dread ; and as long as he was thus aloof from the world, he was happy.

All this generated many reflections, which he turned to profit ; proving in this how good it often is (for a young mind especially) sometimes to be alone. It then can weigh, without distraction from strifes or temptations out of doors, the real nature and value of things ; it examines its own proceedings and character ; discovers and overcomes prejudices ; and prepares, with refreshed powers, for the scenes it has still to encounter.

Such is one of the advantages of temporary solitude, particularly in youth, if youth will submit to it ; and then it is that even youth can discover

“ How charming is divine philosophy,
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute.”

One consequence of this was a resolution (how often made, and how often broken, by many besides himself!) to keep a journal—a fearful resolve, if sincerely kept; worse than useless, if dishonestly fulfilled. I suppose he was at least not dishonest; for he never went beyond his purpose; which, to show his opinions, I subjoin.

“In this,” says he, “I mean to draw a complete picture of myself: the history of my mind as well as my actions; its operations, contests, changes, improvements, fallings off, progress, tastes, employments, passions. Serious or trifling, the record will show me what I am, and, by consequence, what other men are; so that, by constant and minute attention to myself, I shall be able, without actual experience of others, to discover human nature.

“But the *sine qua non* is sincerity—a tremendous requisite; for who would deliberately blast his own character? who frame a standing record of his own weakness or infamy? No! I am not such a presumptuous fool as Rousseau. If I cannot, therefore, write good, I will write nothing.”*

* We quite agree with Sterling in this notion of a journal. How many have rued its truth, besides Rousseau, Laud, Bubb Doddington, Horace Walpole, &c., who very honestly published their weaknesses or villanies to the world. The world are much obliged to them.

Thus, our strange medley of sense and nonsense found relief; and the days he thus passed in the seclusion of his father's garden (far different from what it would have been had his father himself been there), were at least the most free from mortification, and therefore the happiest, since he had quitted the *illecebæ* of Langston Castle.

On the other hand, to remember those *illecebæ* as he did, was dangerous to his peace. The charm, the grace, the exquisite nature of one, at least, of the ladies he had met there, absorbed all his thoughts, even, as we have said, without a hope to bless them. Yet, strange to say, this very hopelessness prevented his repressing the thought of her. Had he been a duke, and able therefore to pretend to her, he might have balanced upon the conduct to pursue; but condemned for ever to distance and silence, and his adoration not even known, he imagined he had a right to build what castles he pleased, so long as they were in the air.

He was, however, sometimes alive to his danger.

"I fear," said he once, as with folded arms he wandered through his little wilderness, "that visit did me no good, and Wilson was only right in advising me against it. But in what is he not

always more right than I? And yet, as he says, he never could have got the prize for the *literæ humaniores*. No matter! though the Langston visit has, as he said it would, made all other things insipid, by showing me such a being as Melusina, it has also told me there are such vulgar great ones as the Trelawneys."

At this his thoughts took another turn, and all his spleen revived. Like the royal family, indeed! Acquaintance not to cease! and then he stamped with vexation, and coloured with anger, though alone; and in this we own he showed that he had made little progress in that "divine philosophy" which he had so much sought.

These, however, were small outbreaks—did not last—became less frequent; and, to banish them altogether, he set about translating the famous panegyric of Virgil upon the happiness of the farmer, who, if he possess not palaces, nor is flattered by crowded levees, nor clothed in purple and fine linen, enjoys, *as is supposed*, quiet and independence, and sincerity of character.

To strengthen this still more, he pored over Thomson's imitation of it (like most imitations,

weakening the original), but still placing his happy swain

“ Deep in the vale, with a choice few retired,
Scorning fantastic joys.”

He, at the time, agreed too with Thomson,
in ascribing to the spoiled children of the world,

“ A face of pleasure, but a heart of pain.”

To be sure, also, he preferred

“ A *solid* life, estrang’d
To disappointment and fallacious hope.”

Between Virgil and Thomson, then, the
devil’s in it if our hermit does not speedily re-
cover.

But *was* his

“ A solid life, estrang’d
To disappointment and fallacious hope?”

The sequel will show.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. STERLING GOES TO HARROWGATE, AND IS
NOT COMFORTABLE THERE.

“ Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate ye.”

HIS sojourn in his retreat was cut short by being summoned to attend his mother, who was suffering in health, to Harrowgate, his father being detained in town on pressing business. As he loved his mother, this was a pleasing duty, and they were soon comfortably installed at the Green Dragon. The company, as is known, live together at a *table-d'hôte*, and the places are all allotted according to seniority; so that whoever are neighbours on arriving, continue to be so to the end. His mother being an invalid, lived in her own room, and he had to seek his fortune as last comer, at the bottom of the public table. He lamented the uncertainty of this, in respect of companions, as he was not sure that such chance-comers would suit his ambition. Think

then of his pleasure, on finding himself assigned as a neighbour to a family the most distinguished in the room, and, certainly, from their appearance and conversation, of a superior order. Sir William, Lady, and Mr. and Miss Manvers composed the group among whom he was admitted; but, sad to say, their very names terrified him. He was seized with a retiring fit, and having no kind Lord Langston to protect him, was even unusually distressed. Sir William, however, an unaffected country gentleman, of large fortune and plain sense, made his situation as easy to him as he could, by the trifling civilities of neighbourhood which he was able to show; but his lady, who was more stately, or affected to be so, than Lady Langston herself, without its sitting so naturally upon her, seemed jealously on the watch against any thing like encroachment on his part; and, in particular, like Lady Trelawney, changed places with her daughter, when he was introduced at the end of the table by the *maitre-d'hôtel*. Mr. Manvers, her son, measured him with a cold, scrutinizing eye, which was any thing but pleasant to his jealous feelings; for, though not very refined, he was a man evidently of some fashion in his way. The dinner, therefore, proceeded in the

veriest style of an English dinner, where the guests are unknown to one another, and each seems to suspect his neighbour of the crime of not being good enough to associate with.

This weighed, indeed, so much with Mr. Manvers, after whispering with his mother, that seeing the *mâitre-d'hôtel* near, he left his place to speak to him ; and Robert plainly heard, in part of the *mâitre-d'hôtel's* reply, his own name pronounced, with the addition of "sick mother," and "son of Sir Robert." With this, Mr. Manvers returned to his place, and shouldered Sir Robert's son a little less than he had done, but still with no advance towards civility.

When the company broke up, however, and at coffee, there was a considerable change, or at least the looks were not so averted, and the demeanour not quite so distant. Sir William went so far as to say he believed he had known his father at Edinburgh ; which, though doubtful to Robert, as he could not gainsay it, he only received with a bow.

The truth was, that on Mr. Manvers' report of Sir Robert Sterling, Sir William set him down as the Scotch baronet of that name, and Lady Manvers said he had the air of a gentleman.

Young Manvers, who had been long trained

to the world, and was what is called *knowing*, thought, to use his own expression, that he was rather *unlicked*. Be this as it may, Lady Manvers so far relaxed her dignity, that seeing him insulated near her table, she asked him if he would take coffee; and on his expressing his thanks, Honora Manvers poured it out with an air of frankness, which immediately made her rise twenty degrees in the thermometer of his favour.

In the evening there was a dance, and the ice had now been so far broken, that Miss Manvers, being as fond of dancing as other girls of eighteen, wished to make one; and her family neither knowing, nor wishing to know, any of the other young men, the advance was not difficult to a still closer acquaintance.

In short, upon the strength of his supposed Scottish descent, and that alone, Robert Sterling was allowed to dance with Miss Manvers, though, as Lady Euphrasia would have said, *faute de mieux*.

In fact, Lady Manvers, who, though somewhat of a higher calibre than Lady Wronghead, resembled that lady in her ambition to shine in high London society, and dragged her husband every spring to a handsome house in Berkeley

Square, had been a little anxious, by questioning him about certain of her fashionable acquaintance, to ascertain the extent of his own; and finding him utterly ignorant, was not quite at her ease.

He was, however, allowed to be happy, and the next day still more so; for he seemed established of the Manvers party, and Mr. Manvers permitted himself to play at billiards with him, and to win his money with an air even of graciousness. He then invited him to his stables, where he condescended to explain to him—what he certainly stood in need of—the merits of two fine horses of his, which had led the field in a neighbouring hunt.

Passing, however, through the coach-yard, and observing a chariot with only an S upon it, which Robert said was his father's, he asked what were his arms, and was a little surprised to find that he did not know, for he had never remembered the carriage with any thing more than an initial.

Even this made no difference in the behaviour of the Manverses,—which, indeed, became still more encouraging, from Sir William having learned from a Mr. Sydenham, an Oxford graduate, with whom he had made a casual

acquaintance at the Wells, that the son of Sir Robert Sterling was considered there a very promising scholar, and had gained the last prize for Latin verse.

Both Lady and Miss Manvers were more influenced in his favour by this account ; and another engagement to dance with Honora that evening met with no manner of difficulty, either from the young lady or her mamma.

But, again, the vanity of sublunary prospects ! At dinner a travelling carriage drove into the inn-yard, and young Manvers exclaimed, “ the Trelawneys, by Jove ! ”

Robert turned pale and red by turns, and in a few minutes a note was brought from Lady Trelawney to Lady Manvers, who it now turned out was her sister, and had been expecting her, which she read loud enough to be heard by the party. “ We are arrived, and mean to dine *en particulier*, but will join you in the rooms, if you don’t come to us before.”

We are ashamed to say how much this affected Robert Sterling’s nerves. His philosophy was all gone, and with it his defiance of the hollow-hearted Trelawneys. He secretly cursed his unhappy fate ; he wished to escape from Harrogate, and but for his mother would have done

so. He then changed, and resolved to meet the enemy boldly, and conquer or die.

It was in the rooms, however, that the battle was to be fought, where he was engaged to dance with Miss Manvers, and, of course, could not fail, even if he wished it. To this field he proceeded, and had it been a real field of battle, he probably would not have felt greater palpitation.

Luckily the Trelawneys had not yet appeared, and he saw no signs that any thing had passed about him between the great ladies. He therefore waited the signal for dancing, to claim his partner, who, on her part, was equally ready to be claimed. Before they stood up, however, the two parties had joined, and Miss Trelawney recognizing Robert, pointed him out to her mother, who gave a faint exclamation of "bless me!" which did not escape her sister.

"You seem to know Mr. Sterling," said Lady Manvers.

"Yes!" returned Lady Trelawney, "I have certainly seen him. Are *you* acquainted with him?"

"He danced with Honora last night," replied Lady Manvers, "and is going to do so now. His father is Sir Robert Sterling, a Nova Scotia

baronet, an acquaintance long ago of Sir William ; so, as he is a good dancer ——”

“ This is too good,” said Lady Trelawney, interrupting her ; and then the two ladies entered into a close whisper, and then Honora was called away, just as she was about to stand up, and then Mr. Manvers ; and an earnest conference of two or three minutes ensued, which placed poor Robert upon tenter-hooks.

He waited the issue with as much fortitude as he could muster ; at last, he was astounded to see Mr. Manvers lead his sister out of the room ; and Lady Manvers, advancing to him, said she was sorry to say her daughter felt so suddenly unwell, that it was quite impossible she could dance with him, or, indeed, dance at all that night.

Sterling had only to express his concern ; but, from the seeming disturbance of the ladies, and a rather angry look of young Manvers, as he led his sister away, it was easy for him to perceive that something had passed in regard to himself, which was the real cause of his partner's indisposition. What it was he could not exactly tell, but his heart beat, almost to bursting, when he thought of it. He had fifty projects to discover it. He would make young Manvers,

or his father, or Lady Mauvers, tell him ; or he would insist upon Lady Trelawney's doing so, who had evidently originated the measure, perhaps from slander, certainly from pride. Either way, he would not submit to it ; either way he was miserable ; he must and would act.

His action, however, for that night at least, evaporated in a moodiness, if not a sulkiness of behaviour, which we are ashamed to record. He walked up and down the room with anger, and even fierceness, in his looks, whenever he came near any of the Manvers party. On the women he turned his back ; at the men he looked defiance ; and young Manvers he particularly watched, to detect, if he could, any approach to contempt, in manner or countenance, which would have been the signal for instant war. A great diversion, however, was at hand.

The Duke and Duchess of Derwent, two of the greatest (perhaps *the* greatest) grandees of England, with a brother of the duke and a young sister of the duchess, had been all day expected, in their way to their northern castle ; and all the company of the hotel, particularly the proprietor of it, had been in a proportionable agitation.

They arrived some hours later than expected,

and finding the evening so advanced, and there being no ceremony as to dress, they just looked in at the rooms before supper.

The bustle they created may be supposed. Many of the inmates had never seen a duke or a duchess, and crowded with more or less effrontery, according to their greater or less sense of propriety, to stare and judge.

The duchess, the most unaffected, modest person, not merely of her rank, but almost of her sex, totally unconscious that she was the object of all this curiosity, walked quietly, leaning on her husband's arm, to a bench opposite the Trelawneys.

What most struck the gazers was the perfect simplicity of her dress and manners, so entirely without presumption, though inimitable, from the natural grace and symmetry of her person. A mere white gown, and little black lace cloak, but showing an elegance of shape that laughed at ornament, and a head totally unadorned, except by the braiding of two dark tresses crossing an oval polished forehead,—was all the outline which this pleasing lady exhibited; while a straw-coloured silk reticule, suspended from the hand that was at liberty, gave an easy air of occupation to her movements.

Such was this beautiful proof that simplicity can set off even the very first rank in life, as well as the most moderate,

“And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.”

To almost all in the room the duchess was a perfect stranger; but Lady Trelawney was happy to think she was favoured with her acquaintance; that is, her name was upon her visiting-list, and they exchanged visits, or rather left cards mutually, once in a season.

This, however, Lady Trelawney naturally supposed would swell into consequence, in such a place as Harrowgate, where there was such a dearth of proper companions; and the thought glanced rapidly through her mind, that as Derwent Castle was not a very great way off, an invitation might ensue.

Lady Trelawney, however, did not join the throng of gazers, affecting to laugh at their plebeian curiosity, and resolved, in all due dignity, to keep her seat, till those great ones should discover her.

“They will soon find me out,” said Lady Trelawney to her sister, looking at the duchess with all her eyes; “but we must really make room for them, if they come.”

Upon which she desired her son and Sir Wil-

liam and Miss Manvers to move, in order to show that there was sufficient space. Miss Trelawney, however, was directed to sit still.

"I see," said her mother, "there is Lady Elizabeth, whom I want you much to become acquainted with, and who will naturally be glad to sit by a girl of her own age. There is Lord Alfred, too, to whom I should be glad to present Ernest."

The arrangement, however, was a little interrupted, by Lady Manvers filling the vacant space with her very large person, in order to whisper to her sister that this was an excellent time for her, Lady Manvers, to be presented to the duchess; a thing she had much wished in London, but had never been able to accomplish.

"Lord bless me, yes!" said Lady Trelawney, rather hastily; "but you really must not sit there. I see they have made me out, and will cross over directly, and there will be no room for her, if you take it all up."

Lady Manvers, dignified as she was, felt rather in an indignant bustle, but did as she was bid.

All this was a thorough treat to Robert Sterling, who heard and saw enough to make it all out, and was not now so raw and inexperienced as not to see that his enemy, Lady Trelawney,

and her stately sister, too, belonged to the class of the great little.

“ I shall have my revenge,” said he.

And have it he did ; for though the duchess, as Lady Trelawney said, had made her out, and the empty space by her side was most comfortably extended, so as to be as inviting as possible, no advance had yet been made by the great planet to cross the room ; and the whole plan had been nearly overturned by the *brusquerie* of the wife of a great Yorkshire grazier, who came annually from the moors, to see a little of the polite world at Harrowgate. This lady, having taken a full view of the duchess, whom she was surprised to see so poorly dressed, as she said, and observing the empty space so vigilantly guarded by Lady Trelawney, without ceremony squatted down in it, to her ladyship's great annoyance. It was in vain that this great person looked a thousand meaning things—first angrily, then contemptuously, then beseechingly—and, at last, fearfully, when she saw the duchess about to move, and, of course, to cross over. This last, however, determined her, and, with as much civility as her indignation permitted, she informed her neighbour that the place she had taken belonged to the duchess, and entreated her to move.

. "That's impossible, Ma'am," said the grazier's lady ; " for I have watched her ever since she came into the room, and she has never been on this side yet. However, if she is a friend of your's, one seat's as good as another to me, and I will move."

Lady Trelawney, mollified, made her a dignified bow, and the intruder quitted the seat with an actual laugh, in which Robert most maliciously joined.

This, we allow, was exceedingly rude ; and the affronted lady marked her sense of the liberty taken, by looks in which anger and contempt, mingled with something like mortification, were palpably expressed. But all was put an end to by an ominous movement of the duchess and her party, who all got up ; but, instead of crossing over, as was expected, they proceeded towards the door, as if about to retire for the night. This was a blow which could not be borne without an effort to prevent it ; and Lady Trelawney, rising from her seat, hurried to the door, as if she, too, was retiring, in order that, at the exact point of junction, she might give and receive those greetings which she had been so long planning in vain.

Robert Sterling, who followed her to watch the result, did not envy her position, when, after

infusing as much eagerness of interest into her countenance and manner as they could admit of, and dropping a lower curtsy than ever she did in her life, except to the queen, the duchess, with a politeness, but at the same time a coldness of tone any thing but encouraging, returned her salute, by saying she *believed* it was Lady Trelawney, and hoped she was well. She then withdrew, leaving both Lady Trelawney and Lady Manvers, who had followed her in order to be introduced, perfectly astounded.

“Poor thing!” said Lady Trelawney, when she recovered, “she must be dreadfully fatigued, and is hurrying away to bed.”

Now the duchess had only gone to supper; and Sterling again laughed; for, we are sorry to say, he had now begun to enjoy a sort of triumph in his turn, which he turned to account, when he observed that titles, riches, and fashion left a person, vulgar from nature, as vulgar in her prosperity as the most vulgar of St. Swithin’s in their mediocrity. The picture he had seen made him, from better understanding them, laugh at the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; and he went to bed, as he thought, once again completely cured of all his silliness.

CHAPTER XV.

HE DISCOVERS THAT ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT
GLITTERS, AND THAT THERE ARE MANY
LITTLE AMONG THE GREAT.

“——— What did this vanity,
But minister communication of
A most poor issue?”

Henry VIII.

THE next day a fresh triumph, if triumph it could be called, was in store for Robert. Mr. Sydenham, the Harrowgate casual acquaintance of Sir William Manvers, who had informed him of Robert's Oxford reputation, had, it seems, been a very old college companion of the Duke of Derwent, who was glad to meet him again, particularly as he was at that moment anxious to find some well recommended scholar, not so much as a tutor, as a literary companion, while at home, for his brother, Lord Alfred, a youth of seventeen.

Chance does, or appears to do, many critical

things in this world; for while the duke was consulting Mr. Sydenham upon the subject, Sterling passed by, and it occurred to Sydenham, who had nobody else in his memory, to mention his name, as having won the under-graduate's prize; he added, that he had been spoken of with favour by Dr. Gaston, and was known to be the friend of Lord Langston.

By chance, again, it happened that the duke had been himself educated at the same college, and under the same principal, Dr. Gaston. Pleased with Robert's appearance, he observed, he was the very man, and desired he might be introduced to him. "If he answers to what he seems," said the duke, "I can easily know from Gaston every thing I wish."

The only difficulty was, that Sydenham himself was not acquainted with him. That, however, was soon got over. Oxford, at a distance of above two hundred miles, is a fair passport among its members to one another; and as Sydenham was a Master of Arts, there was no great liberty in his introducing himself. But when he went farther, and told him that the duke, as an old member of the same college, and who had heard of his prize poem, desired he might be presented to him, Robert was astonished, and

covered with blushes ; he even trembled, looked sheepish, and felt in a dream. The plain manner of the duke, however, restored him. He gave him his hand, asked many questions of his old haunts, and old chief, Dr. Gaston, and by degrees, as his *mauvaise honte* went off, Robert found a good deal to approve, and nothing to dislike. To crown all, the duchess and her sister, and Lord Alfred, coming by, he was presented to them, and again admired the good-breeding of real nobility.

The duke had much of Lord Langston in him, though older ; and the duchess (with the exception of the absence of playfulness, from her being more mature) reminded him sweetly of Lady Melusina's sweetness. We are not sure that the difference in age, and the superior dignity conferred by the marriage state, did not invest the duchess with even still more power over the mind and admiring faculties, though not over the heart, of our sensitive hero, than the youth, radiance, and arch manners of the younger divinity. The difficulty of Robert's position, however, was, to know how he got into it ; particularly when, after some hours' separation, and when the duke had informed his family of his views founded on Mr. Sydenham's report, the whole party, when they

met again, were still more affable to our hero than before.

His situation with this high bevy did not escape the notice, and indeed the wonder of the Trelawney and Manvers parties, and as little did it escape the jealousy of at least one of their number; for young Manvers had made what might be called a dead set at both the duke and his brother, in the billiard-room and the stable-yard, where he had lavished all his eloquence and knowledge in the praise of the duke's horses and carriages, but all to no purpose. The truth is, he had the reputation of a jockey, and the duke, both from his own taste, and from prudence for his brother, was cautious.

While this was going forward with the men, the ladies were not idle. The highest point of Lady Manvers' ambition was an introduction to the duchess, and this she insisted upon her sister's carrying for her; while that lady found her own situation with her grace too equivocal to embarrass it with more than it could bear. Still she had her own reputation, as a leader of fashion, to keep up, and if she could not carry so poor a point as the introduction of so near a relation, her star would be set for ever.

It is far beyond our power, and we believe

much higher powers than ours, to penetrate the secret motives and latent causes that govern the different phases, aspects, and changes, that influence the orbits of fashionable society. Why one star is to-day to be lord of the ascendant, and to-morrow struck from its course ; why one dignitary is all powerful in one set, and totally powerless in another ; what rivalries are occasioned by what causes :—wit, taste, politics, party warfare, birth and precedence, court favour, to say nothing of beauty and mental accomplishments—all these have their influence, and divide the world under different chiefs. One great lady is *touchante* ; another *piquante* ; another a poetess ; another a novelist ; another a blue ; most of them fine. Among the gentlemen, there is the high courtier ; the high Whig ; the giver of dinners ; the giver of balls ; the affable ; the supercilious ; the sayer of good things ; the sayer of nothing ; the lady's man ; the talking man. Among all these, both men and women, there may be acquaintance ; but no amity ; intercourse, but no identity : they are separated by jealousy, avoid intimacies, and, among the fine class, covet, or, as the case may be, have a horror of introductions.

To which class our Lady Trelawney belonged,

may, by this time, be pretty well guessed; but nothing shows the precariousness of her sort of ambition more than that she was kept out of the lead she coveted a whole year, by an unfortunate pun of one of her rivals, who was at the head of the witty class. We have related, that her father owed his fortune to India, and, in fact, chiefly to a great contract for supplying bullocks to the army there during a long war. Now Lady Trelawney not unfrequently made mistakes in language, and, one day, a gentleman observing to her rival that she was famous for bulls: "No wonder," said the witty lady; "for her father had a contract for them in India."

This spread, and her progress was impeded. Not that she would have cared for the joke; but the true sting consisted in its perpetuating the knowledge of her origin, which she had no wish to have proclaimed.

We are far from saying that this squib, which was only made hurtful by the manner in which it was taken, had any part in causing the sort of distance which always prevailed towards Lady Trelawney, on the part of the Duchess of Derwent, to whom we now return. The mind of the latter was too gentle, I had almost said, too simple—by which I mean, too pure—certainly

it was too little tainted by the unworthy squabbles of pride and vanity—to allow such a trifle to operate in her likes or dislikes. The truth is, that though her immense and uncontested superiority of birth, rank, and fortune, gave her the command of the whole world for acquaintance, her own resources and quiet nature made her, from taste, retire within a small, though very select, circle of friends, for her social enjoyment. Once, or at most twice a-year, the magnificence of Derwent House in town was displayed to the higher world; which made all lesser stars, like our Lady Trelawney, hide their diminished heads. But after that, the gates were closed “to the general,” and the task of receiving visitors devolved, for the most part, on the porter. Nevertheless, her own consequence, whether real from personal merit, or adventitious from fortune, accompanied, too, by very high favour at court, made the acquaintance of this great and amiable lady of the first importance to a numerous set of Trelawneys and Manverses, which it was not at all her own wish to cultivate, still less to enlarge. We can assign no other reason than this for the sort of coldness she showed towards our ambitious viscountess, and the studiousness with which she endeavoured to avoid

the presentation of Lady Manvers, which she plainly perceived was the desire and design of both the sisters.

Having brought this intricate matter to the intelligible point, we return to the duchess and our hero, whom we have too long neglected.

The wonder of the whole exclusive party at seeing Sterling's miraculous promotion, for so it appeared, may be conceived.

"It is extraordinary," said the younger Manvers, "how these pushing fellows get on. I was riding in the stubbles an hour ago, and observed this merchant's clerk, or whatever he is—"

"You forget," said the plain Sir William, who had some justice in him, "that he is at least a scholar, and the son of a gentleman."

"Of a knight, if you please, Sir: a Knight of St. Swithin's Lane, but surely no gentleman!"

"I don't know that," returned Sir William; "at least your grandfather, before he went to India—"

"O, dear Sir," replied young Manvers, "let us have nothing about blackguard contracts, and bullocks. You, at least, are an old English gentleman; and how the devil this upstart, who I dare say would pretend to Honora, if we would let him, came to be walking arm-in-arm with

Lord Alfred, and afterwards join the duke and duchess, while we are avoided, and refused their acquaintance, would puzzle a wiser head than mine."

"I am glad, Dick," said Sir William, drily, "to find that you think in any thing there can be a wiser head than yours."

Mr. Manvers bowed, and not liking the conversation, sought his mother and aunt, who, with the rest of the family, were preparing for a walk.

"I declare," said Lady Trelawney, "if we meet this proud woman, I have a great mind not to speak to her. I wish I knew which way she is gone, for I have no desire to meet her."

Now in this, Lady Trelawney was not absolutely speaking false; for with her sister, and her sister's child upon her hands, all counting upon a presentation, her self-confidence gave way, and she wished there were no duchesses, or at least none of such very old families, among the nobility of England.

"I don't see why we should avoid her, either," observed Lady Manvers, "and I hear they go to-morrow."

"I saw them on the Knaresborough-road,"

said young Manvers, "and perhaps we shall meet the Dutch gentleman with them."

"Ridiculous!" cried Lady Trelawney.

The Dutch gentleman, however, *was* with them; and, to the amazement of the party, was seen arm-in-arm, and in earnest conversation, with the duke.

"We can go on till they turn," said Lady Manvers; but, to her disappointment, they turned through a gate into a wood, which seemed to belong to a small house in the centre of it.

Lady Trelawney felt rather relieved. "It is impossible to follow them there," said her ladyship.

"I will, however," cried young Manvers. "The keeper at that house has a pointer to sell, and I believe the youngster Alfred may want to see it. I almost spoke to him and the duke this morning in the stable-yard, and I should like to see whether they choose to know me or not."

"Do as you please," said his aunt, testily; "but I say again it is impossible *we* can go. It would let us down too much;" she therefore walked on, and the aspiring but disappointed Lady Manvers felt obliged to follow her.

And thus, as we have before moralized, there is a great vulgar, as well as a little one, and as many humiliations and mortifications among coronets and coaches and six, as in a shop or counting-house, though of St. Swithin's itself. All the difference is in the mind, which is always our own, and determines the happiness or misery of a duke or a dustman.

Mr. Richard Manvers was by no means satisfied by his experiment. Certainly it was not for want of pushing it as far as it would go; for, under pretence of wishing to buy the dog, he mingled himself with all the company, gave his opinion freely and frequently, and did all that volubility, unrestrained by bashfulness, could do, to elicit notice and conversation with the noble party in return.

The duke had been inexorable before; and the duchess and her sister were disgusted with his flippancy and forwardness. But that nothing might be left unattempted, he all of a sudden became particularly civil to Robert, to whom he bowed, and asked how he did.

What are we to say of our hero, when forced to record that, with something like a very malignant pleasure, he received this as if it was from a perfect stranger, and continued talking

to the duke, as if he had not noticed the address. No doubt this was a littleness to which he ought not to have stooped. But it is our business to record facts, not to defend them.

The anger kindled in Manvers by this reception of his advance, added, we fear, to the sweetness of Robert's revenge; and this was still farther enhanced by the duke's saying, though not intending to be heard, "I did not suppose you were acquainted with that person."

Whether Mr. Manvers heard this or not, we do not know; but, darting a look of excited anger against both the duke and Robert, he left his errand about the dog unfinished, and departed with precipitation.

On his return to the hotel, he found his father and mother walking before the door, and Lady Manvers asked him eagerly how he had succeeded?

"O!" said he, "I had no wish to make the attempt; for never in my life did I see people so ill-bred. Lord Alfred seems a blockhead; the duke not much better; the duchess a prude, and Lady Elizabeth a minx."

"It seems," said Sir William, with some sourness, "you did not get much by your

scheme ; which, with submission to you, was both a foolish and a mean one."

" I differ with you," said Lady Manvers, bridling.

" It is over," cried Manvers, " and all dukes and duchesses may go the devil for me."

" Exactly so," observed Sir William, " and so I dare say thinks young Mr. Sterling in regard to us."

" D—n him," said Manvers.

" I am not surprised at your imprecations," returned his father, " for I think he beats you, Dick, at your own weapons."

The causticity of Sir William did not please either his wife or son.

" I wish," said Lady Manvers, " these people had let us alone."

" Or rather that we had let them alone," persevered Sir William.

" We shall see to-day at dinner," observed the lady.

" They are in a private lodging," replied Sir William ; " so we shall not have the felicity of showing them how angry we are."

From all this, it should appear that Sir William knew, and laughed at, his wife's foible,

and fully understood the character of his son; as to both which, luckily for him, he exerted a good deal of philosophy, where other fathers and husbands might have been seriously annoyed.

The close of this little adventure was extraordinary. Sir Robert Sterling joined his wife, who was much better, and both the duke and Lord Alfred were so much pleased with young Robert, that they invited him to accompany them to Derwent Castle, without waiting for Dr. Gaston's reply to the duke's letter; though the duke did not open to Sterling his ultimate design.

The Manvers and Trelawney parties were absolutely lost in astonishment, when they beheld the duke's three carriages drive off from the door, into the first of which they beheld Robert Sterling hand the duchess and Lady Elizabeth, and, by the duke's invitation, place himself by their side.

Whether this success of our hero, however, was a gain to his happiness, whatever it might be to his seeming prosperity, may be made a question.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEQUAL FRIENDSHIPS.

“ Verily,
I swear 'tis better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers, in content,
Than to be perk'd up in a glittering grief,
And wear a golden sorrow.”

Henry VIII.

It is an old and just observation, that unequal friendships seldom end happily. There are a thousand reasons for this, which we ourselves would give, but that they are better done to our hand in a letter, from the blunt but sagacious Wilson, in answer to one from his mercurial friend.

Wilson to Sterling.

I give you joy of having subdued your enemies, but would rather you had had no enemies to subdue. You have knocked them down, one after another, like children, when they have set up

cards to play at soldiers; and you and the children have equal glory, for you both create the enemies you conquer. This, you will say, is a very ungracious answer to what you have in all friendliness communicated.

But can I too often try to cure the only weak point about you? The foolish people whose defeat you so well describe, were certainly strong enough to vex and mortify you. Could they have done so, if you yourself had not been willing to be vexed and mortified? "Resist the devil," they say, "and he will flee from you." So it is with people of fashion, who can only triumph over us when we please to let them. But peace to their manes! I hope, if I do not trust, that we shall hear no more of them.

Would I could say that I think you are not in greater danger from causes of a totally opposite nature. You were almost ruined from your apprehension of being slighted. May you not be quite so by being too well treated? Never was independent man so dependent! Never modest man so proud. Can you not solve the paradox? or shall I do it for you? We saw what your high spirit did for your happiness, in putting you in the power of a set of butterflies, to whom you gave consequence enough to let them treat

you ill. What will your self-love now do among the high beings who treat you so well ?

I tremble for you, Sterling ; for I know your sensibility, and how it runs away with you, whether for good or for evil. You were damaged by your visit to an earl ; what will you be now, in one to a duke ? There is a duchess, too ! all sweetness, all beauty (and oh ! most dangerous of all !) all condescension ! What guards upon yourself will not these require ?

Suppose you should fall in love ! You adore already at a distance ; and we shall have you, like the warm-brained rascal of Geneva I have lately been reading, kneel down in your hiding-place, where you can see her and not be seen, to indulge in the devotion of your humble worship. Pray heaven the master do not catch you, as he did Rousseau, and send you away in disgrace !

But pardon me, good friend ; I allow I am savage, when I only meant to be wise. In good truth, though you will hate me for saying so, I wish you had never accepted the duke's invitation. Were he a mere great man, or rather grandee, I should not so much fear ; because a good dose of mortification, now and then, might carry off your false pride, by rousing the true. But here, his very good qualities, and still more

those of the amiable woman you describe, involve you in greater danger.

“Danger of what?” you will say ; and I think I see you cast my letter from you. But pick it up again and read ; for it is a friend (homely but true) who writes.

If I know you right, you have a high spirit of genuine independence. You have also a *quantum sufficit* of vanity. The last may urge and has urged you into situations, in which the first only makes you the more unhappy. But passing the inferior quality, though the superior one may and ought to do good, may it not, by being improperly exposed to danger, do harm to your happiness ? Courage is in itself a virtue ; but does not rashness often involve it in difficulty ?

Well ; you have now entered a great house ! you are patronised by a great man ! you mix, almost as an equal, not only with him, but with elegant and fascinating women. Their politeness and unassuming natures allow you to know no difference, in treatment at least, between themselves and you. But are you what you seem to be ? Is your dependence less real, because you are not made to feel it ? Are the duke’s friends your friends ? Will they ever regard you as more than reader, or very humble companion, to

Lord Alfred ? Are you sure, too, of the latter, as you are of the duke ? He is young, and may therefore be inconsiderate. May he not usurp, and put on the patron, who can retain or dismiss you as he pleases ? And if he do, what rebellion, and therefore annoyance, will not be kindled in your very combustible spirit ?

Were you an established tutor, the thing might be more bearable. Your duty and your character are then marked out. Your rights cannot be invaded ; and you will not, by stepping beyond them, be exposed to mortification. But here your position is undefined. You are an independent gentleman, and yet a retainer. A supposed visitor, and yet (shall I name it ?) an implied hanger-on ! Of all difficult situations, the most difficult to manage I ever knew is this sort of unequal alliance of a humble friend with a powerful one. A thousand little feelings, individually almost imperceptible on both sides, are to be managed ; the want of due land-marks confounding boundaries and involving mutual discontent. A cold look ; a quicker tone of voice in the superior ; too free a mingling of himself in the inferior ;—how often do all these seeming trifles, minute in themselves, swell into an unbearable account between the parties, inevitably

most felt by the humbler one. In vain he seeks a friend, to whom he may unburthen himself ; in vain wishes for that cheerfulness which he probably enjoyed when unknown to the ambition that has ruined him.

“ Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever med’cine him to that sweet sleep
That he owed yesterday.”

In fact, his bed, which

“ Knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,”

and seals the eyes of the man not above his condition, becomes a restless torment to him who has made himself a dependent. Forgive me if I say, should this turn out to be your fate at the castle, that Bloomsbury, and even St. Swithin’s itself, would be heaven in comparison.

But my preaching does not stop here. Grant that all goes smoothly ; that the duke is always a benignant star ; and that you revel in the sweetness of the duchess’s smile :—will these send you happier to your home ? Will they make your family circle more bearable, whose worth, and even whose affection, great as they are, may possibly not make up for the new, but imperious, wants you will have created for yourself—the refinements of elegance and the attractions of rank ?

I know that if your mind were as rightly constituted, as I trust it *will* be, there would be no doubt upon this. But is it (excuse me) at present thus constituted? and if not, will not the difficulty of returning to your place be increased?

You have lamented that there is not more of cultivation, more of scholarship, among your father's friends, and a better *tournure*—that is, more of *ton*—among your mother's. Would this have been a complaint with you, if you had not known Lord Langston, and made one of his family? And will the inconvenience be remedied by being still more rooted in the duke's?

You passed over the strong sense, and real worth, and even the agreeable talents, which many of your natural acquaintances possess, because they do not shine in classic knowledge. How many who do so shine are mere pedants, and not to be compared in usefulness, and therefore in respectability, with those you pretend to despise, but cannot in reality?

Your females, too, are insipid, since you have seen a Lady Melusina and a Duchess of Derwent. But why? Have those deities (whom I by no means wish to undervalue) better hearts, or better manners, or do they even dress with more *natural* (I will not talk of artificial) taste,

than your pleasing sister Caroline? Have they even finer minds, or are they more alive to real cultivation? I speak not of a variety of languages, or even accomplishments, if unaccompanied by a power to feel them; and if they do feel them, can they do so more than the amiable, unsophisticated girl I have mentioned? Then, as companions, what is the great and only difference between them, but that the one lives in Grosvenor, the other in Bloomsbury Square; that the companions of the one are, like themselves, titled; of the other, like herself, amiable.

There! I see you despise me, as an ignoramus—as one who has a dull soul. Take care that you do not discover that *you* have a too sensitive one; and that, formed as you are for liberal happiness, you have not mistaken glitter for gold, and grandeur for content.

The Answer.

I TAKE your letter as you would have me—in excellent part—for I see friendship in every line of it. But are you so right and I so wrong as you imagine? Is there really such contagion in an unequal alliance as you have painted? Were all the great, or those who call themselves so,

Trelawneys, or Manverses, or Tylneys, I would say, behold me already cured. I have given them to the winds. But is this so—will this ever be so—with the duke and duchess, with Langston, or Melusina? and if not, why put on armour where there will be no combat? Why not be happy in weeds of peace?

According to you, we are never to embark in friendships, or form connexions, but with our exact equals. If so, who would ever rise? Where the great impetus to honourable, to useful ambition? A tinker's son must be himself a tinker. The misery and impolicy of castes must paralyze Europe as it does India; and all our faculties sleep for want of employment. Commend me to the reply of an energetic character in a great profession, who eventually became a peer, and who was taunted by a struggling rival with his being the son of a tailor: "Yes, Sir; and if your father had been a tailor, you would have been a tailor too."

You are eloquent, exciting, and pathetic, by turns, in setting before me the miseries of dependence. Think you I want warning? or am I not rather, as you say, too combustible myself? Were I to feel slighted, much more affronted, would a finger be necessary to be held up to

make me fly ? No : this you do not think. But my weakness is your strong point. My *vanity* (it would have been better expressed to have said my *ambition*, best of all, perhaps, my *taste*) is, according to you, the rock that will destroy me. I am undermining my natural resources; poisoning the simplicity of my enjoyments, and rendering myself unfit for the moderate lot to which I am destined !

That may, or may not be ; but, at least, if it has already been done, neither the duke nor Lord Langston is guilty of it. It is nature, and the education my father has given me, that are to blame, if blame there be. You are wholly wrong in thinking I *ever* could have relished the society to which you recommend me, their strong sense and worth notwithstanding. And as for the women, name them not. I thank you for all you say of Caroline—she is a tolerable specimen of what *may* be done in her class ; but to compare her to Melusina, still more to the queen who reigns here !—Goth and Vandal as you are ! “thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.” In a word, I can renounce society altogether, but if I am to live in it, let me at least have the pleasure of choosing for myself. You tell me of dan-

gers, and I allow I may fail : my answer is—
“ *Magnis tamen excidit ausis.*”

After all, it is you who are the proud man, who cannot bear to associate with persons greater than yourself. Observe, and give me credit for my humility.

Adieu. We shall meet at Oxford, where it is, however, determined that Lord Alfred is not to go. Till then farewell.

R. S.

Wilson to Sterling.

Your letter is a tissue of sophisms. Who ever said that exertion was not to be made, or useful and honourable ambition not pursued? How different is this from dangling after mere rank and station, however accompanied by manners or condescension. Condescension ! I hate the word. Let the advantages be mutual, a *quid pro quo*, and independence is preserved. But a visitor upon sufferance!—in other words, what I have called it, a hanger-on ! Forbid it all spirit—particularly yours. Be assured, in this respect, the duke's butler is far more independent than Lord Alfred's companion. The butler obeys

orders. For this he was hired, and there an end. The companion has an equivocal character, which nobody understands. No *orders* can be given; yet if *wishes* are not obeyed, though perhaps they are not even divined, harmony is disturbed, and the *implied* contract broken.

You talk of connexions. Do I forbid them? No: only let them be *con*-nexions. Let not the tie be all on one side; let the advantage be mutual, and draw to one another as closely as you please. Let the duke be proud of you, and *want* your assistance, and you may be proud to give it. To *seek his* protection, would be to relinquish your own. You have already achieved reputation—enlarge it by exertion—establish still farther a character for abilities (it scarcely signifies in what), and you open your own way better than by being gentlemann-usher to another, though that other were a duchess, or even a queen.

I will not scold you for refusing Amsterdam. The muse and literature will excuse much—sacrifice much. But then it is with a view to liberty, as the best means of philosophic happiness; not to let the delighted spirit evaporate in the fumes of a tea-table, or the pageant of a drawing-room. If so, the real votary of science

in his garret is happier, because more dependant upon himself, than all the Sir Plumes, with golden snuff-box and clouded cane.

But though I would rather have you wise than merely wealthy, wealth was not the only thing you renounced in renouncing Amsterdam.

Do you remember Voltaire's comparison between the courtier and the merchant? "The merchant begins his day by going to his counting-house, where he sees a dozen clerks, depending upon him for their decent livelihood; all industrious, all useful. He opens a pile of letters from all parts of the world, announcing shipments of the various commodities necessary for the welfare of his own and other nations, to which his ships fly in all directions, east, west, north, and south; and these set to work and produce the support of a hundred thousand fellow-creatures, and contribute largely to the revenues, that is, the safety of the kingdom. He then gives directions to his correspondents, which affect the interests of the most distant states—perhaps the politics of kings, and the liberty of subjects; and with careful foresight he regulates the exchanges all over the world. Thus, by his single head, which must be evi-

dently an able one, he influences the condition of millions.

“ Now take the courtier, who begins his day by making his way into the ante-room of the king’s bed-chamber. He is all anxiety to know how the king slept, that he may be among the first to spread it among the coffee-houses of Paris. But if he is told that the king slept with the queen, no bounds to his rapture. He envies the lord-in-waiting who presents the king’s shirt, and he waits in eager anxiety till the king shall be dressed and come from his chamber, in order to be honoured by a look or a nod. He then attends the *levée* of the minister ; exchanges bows, and afterwards, if he is of consequence enough, holds a *levée* himself of half-a-score tailors, ‘ carving the fashion of a new doublet,’ which he hopes may be followed by his brother courtiers. Perhaps he may be admitted to a committee on the Opera ; but if he be present at the reading of a new play, he is in glory. He advances in happiness by seeing the king dine, and winds up his useful day by being present at the *ruelle*.”*

What think you ? Do you not in these pic-

* These passages may not be in the exact words of Voltaire ; but the substance is correct.

tures recognise many of those you admire in St. James's Street, and shudder at in Cornhill? Which are most to be respected, I will not torment you by asking.

But if your good sense outweigh your prejudices, you will perhaps think that Amsterdam might not have been so despicable. Still, as I have said, I would not quarrel with your determination, if it was for the sake of the muse, or of ambition of a still more useful kind, in any of the learned professions—the bar, the church. But if merely to bask in court sunshine, and become like Voltaire's hero—perhaps not even that—perhaps not beyond uncle George, who is already on the wane! No, my good friend; assure yourself for this you are not made.

Leave, then, your enchanted castle—tear yourself from the gardens of your Armida—divine though she be—and condescend to be a common person at present, in order to be an uncommon one hereafter.

Such was the sound advice of the plain-minded Wilson. Was it followed? We grieve to say, no! The attractions of the castle—the refine-

ment, the luxury, the polish, the unction to his self-love in the condescensions of the high personages who presided ; above all, the charming duchess, made him like the deaf adder. As to the duchess, what with her real merit, what with her rank, his eyes, ears, and heart told him that Nature, in her,

“ From all that are, took something good,
To make a perfect woman.”

It is very certain that vanity was not the sole, nor even the principal, cause of this effect. We have mentioned his natural bias towards attractions such as were here displayed. He seemed to worship the ground trod upon by a person he thought little less than a divinity. He himself shrank into nothing. He was a sincere devotee ; he worshipped ; he was blind ; he was a fool ! Could Wilson's homely truths have any weight with him ? Alas ! No. To talk to him of the bar, or the church, still more of Amsterdam, revolted him as much as it did Tom the footman, in the Conscious Lovers, when he was in love, to be sent for a tea-kettle.

It must be owned the victory over the Trelawneys was dearly purchased.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. STERLING IS AGAIN HUMBLLED.

“When this ring
Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence.”
Merchant of Venice.

ALL things must have an end. The Oxford term approached, and Robert was called to headquarters. The duke, who had other views of education for his brother, would not hazard him at an English university, and Robert was not able, and indeed was not invited, to accompany him to Geneva, which was his destination for the next year. Sterling, however, was made happy, and I am afraid not indemnified, but damnified for ever, by the assurances of both the duke and duchess, how highly they had appreciated his service, how much they esteemed him, and how glad they should be to see him again.

This, and a cameo which the duchess took off from her delicate finger, sent him, with something like consolation, into the coach which passed by the castle, and in which, though en-

closed with talkative and well-informed people, for above two hundred miles, he did not utter one single word the whole way to London. This we can conceive; but why he should have viewed a very pretty and modest girl, the daughter of one of his companions, with positive distaste, amounting to aversion, though we can guess, we do not often see developed in the records of human life.

For the sake of Robert's constancy, however, do not let it be supposed that the duchess alone absorbed him. His thoughts the whole journey through were occupied by a comparison between her and his first and only love, who had all his heart, though the duchess possessed at that time, most of his mind.

Behold, then, our hero now a second time at Oxford : but oh, how changed ! Three months, —three little months ! Strange that we should be such puppets, so entirely in the power of the springs and wires of the world ! What had not passed since he left his college with Lord Langston, to make his essay in high life. At that time he was the timid, nervous, conscious novice, whom the mere glance of a man of condition, much more a woman, filled with alarm. He now arrived with his high soul elevated to its highest pitch. The standard by which he measured

every thing was nothing less than ducal. A countess was no longer a goddess: for he had seen, nay, had been tolerated by a duchess. He still loved Lord Langston, he still revered his mother, still thought his sisters charming; but they were no longer exclusively so. Above all, he had found that a viscountess, though pretending to the highest fashion, could be as little, and as liable to be mortified, as ever he had been himself.

One good effect which this had upon him was, that he could now look at a velvet cap, and even a gold tassel, without fear, and he even longed to meet the man he had most avoided, and most feared, in order to show with what vigour he could shoulder him. Tylney, indeed, possessed his eternal hatred, as did all others who had ever shown a disposition to cut him; while the slightest inclination to civility, or good-will, much more any expressed approbation or praise of any kind, was, in his inmost feelings (often without knowing it), never forgotten. This, you will say, was, either way, prejudice; but there are such prejudices.

The change which the Langston visit had begun, and which Castle Derwent had perfected, now began to show itself. To be sure he was still in a stuff gown, and his cap still of cloth;

but his countenance was no longer daunted, and his figure was more erect. He of course waited immediately upon the Principal, to thank him for the good report he had made of him to the duke, and the Principal, as usual, received him kindly: that is, he gave him two fingers, and said, "You are not the person I am the least glad to see." In answer, however, to his thanks, he observed, "I did you but justice with the duke; but whether I have done good or harm to yourself remains to be seen. There are minds that cannot bear elevation; take care that yours is not one of them."

Robert was struck: and could it have been possible for Dr. Gaston to have had confidential communication with a bachelor, educated at Merchant Taylor's, he would have supposed he had been consulting his friend Wilson about him. However, this led to farther discussion, both as to his plans and state of mind, and, in particular, the Principal asked whether the divinities of Langston Castle had done him no harm?

Robert looking surprised, the doctor added: "My question arises, I assure you, out of interest for yourself. You have much sensibility, and we know how a taste and distinction in letters can level all other distinctions in the minds of

those who possess them. I do not suppose, with all the vanity, or, as you would call it, the high-mindedness, that belongs to you, you would be such a simpleton as to fall in love with one of the Lady Langstons; but if you have, hide yourself in the bottom of the sea, for you never will succeed, any more than others far beyond you in birth, fortune, and degree."

Robert coloured with something like pique, although he confessed the sagacious doctor might be right in his judgment. "How is it," thought he to himself, "that I never can appear before this man except to be humbled? However, he seems to mean me well." He then asked if he might know to what, or to whom he alluded?

"To what, if you please," returned Dr. Gaston, "but not to whom. In truth, then, having heard of the witcheries of these ladies, and knowing that your nonsense about rank and elegance would only endanger you the more, I think it right to tell you, that with all their affability and playfulness, which I myself have witnessed, and with all the plain worth and sense of their brother, they are all, including Lord Langston himself, as alive as most, nay, more than most of their rank and family, to the misfortune (they would call it the degradation) of a mis-

alliance. But possibly, though vanity blinds one, and their condescension to you was, as I am told, very great, you may have observed some latent spark of self-consequence, under all the unbending which a country residence, and the want of other company, prompted."

Faute de mieux, thought Sterling, and he fairly recounted that expression of Lady Euphrasia to the Principal.

"I am glad you had the sense and tact to observe it," said the doctor. "It was, indeed, this lady's conduct that I glanced at, at first; for, having trifled a whole summer, *faute de mieux*, with a very rich, but not illustrious baronet, sprung from trade, and he having, upon the strength of it, offered himself and a beautiful park to her disposal, her answer was, that she should like the park, but without the master."

"Very unworthy!" said Sterling with some indignation.

"True," observed Dr. Gaston; "but I mention it to shew you that, under the most correct good-breeding, and seeming condescension, where there is real pride at bottom, it will certainly show itself. The very condescension which so beguiles us is pride, and you would miserably

deceive yourself if, by a high match, you thought you could ever be more than Adrian Stokes, the mean gentleman who married a princess of the blood."

Here the trenchant doctor pointed to an engraving, by Vertue, of the Duchess of Suffolk and her husband Stokes, "a mean gentleman,"—with this appropriate inscription :

"Cloth of gold, do not despise,
Though thou art match'd with cloth of frise ;
Cloth of frise, be not too bold,
Though thou art match'd with cloth of gold !"

"In the instance I have given you," added the Principal, "even your friend Lord Langston, modest as in most things he certainly is, was here keenly alive to the loss of caste which would have ensued, had a mere millionaire, with at best an inferior title, presumed to match himself with his cloth of gold. He had his fears for his sister, for the settlements offered were magnificent. But she was as true to her blood as himself, and the baronet had the sense to console himself with one more upon an equality with him in point of rank. When your time comes for marrying, "go thou and do likewise."

He said this with such good-humour (for Robert, from his talents and unartful display

of all his feelings, had become no inconsiderable favourite), that the young man could not help wishing to prolong the conversation, and mal-adroitly enough observed, that the anecdote only concerned Lady Euphrasia.

“Oh,” said the Principal, “I see how the land lies; indeed I knew it long ago. But be assured that though Lady Melusina was glad to hear you quote Spenser on the nightingale, and danced with you, *not merely because it was faute de mieux*,—in regard to love and marriage, and all that youngsters think should level all conditions, she is the countess’s daughter, and the Earl’s and Lady Euphrasia’s sister. Miss Sycamore gave you very good advice. So now get ye gone.”

At this, he almost thrust the poor martyr out of the room, who went to his own, lost in wonder to know how this magician (for such he seemed), could know so much of him.

That the reader may not wonder too, it is but right to tell him that Miss Sycamore was a cousin only twice or thrice removed from the doctor, who esteemed her for her shrewdness, and even corresponded with her, that is, whenever his usual policy made it necessary for him to obtain any information which she had power to give.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HE TRIES TO BECOME A LAWYER.

“ The hideous law,
I never yet could frame my will to 't,
And therefore frame the law into my will.”
Henry VI., Pt. I.

HOWEVER improved, our aspirant would have been happier had he found his friend Lord Langston in college when he returned to it. But having taken a degree, *honoris causa*, he had fled to the Continent, and with him fled what would have been a support, still somewhat wanted by the knight of St. Swithin's.

To be sure he was many degrees higher than he had been. He had advanced at least a couple of years in the manners of the world, particularly of the high world. He no longer blushed when a gentleman-commoner spoke to him, and many did now speak to him on the strength of his rising reputation. He had been first in Classics; he was now first in Mathematics, and bade fair to be the same in Logic; and he rose

proportionably higher in favour with the Principal. But all this (to use the words of our general motto) availed him nothing, so long as he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate.

We humbly beg pardon of Mr. Tylney for comparing him to a Jew; but he, we confess, is the person meant by the Mordecai we have mentioned. If he like it better, we will say he was the nightmare, which, spite of all his struggles, still haunted the aspiring Robert, and pressed him down like an incubus as he was, with *peine forte et dure*.

Wilson too had departed, to exercise his sense and sagacity on his own behalf, at Lincoln's-inn, where at least *mauvaise honte* never comes, and the only rank acknowledged is derived from ability. Sterling was, therefore, left completely to fight his own battles; and with all but this thorn in his side, Mr. Tylney, it must be owned he fought them well.

There was an insolent sneer about this gentleman, which even the known shallowness of his attainments could not always disarm. On the part of a very nervous person, such as our St. Swithin friend, especially if like him he wanted the moral courage of getting the better of his adventitious disadvantages, it was most severely felt. The placid ignorance of Tylney in no wise interrupted, it perhaps enhanced, the cool super-

ciliousness with which he viewed almost every body, equals or inferiors, but especially the last ; exemplifying in this how true it is, that one of the unbearable evils of life are

“ The spurns

Which patient merit of the unworthy takes.”

The success which had attended his first attacks, when he gave Robert the nickname of the knight of St. Swithin's, and the applause he received from his low-born satellites, who ought rather to have made common cause against him, encouraged him to go on. He found Robert vulnerable beyond hope, and he built much of his reputation upon thus smoking, as he called it, the freshman. The zest of this accompanied him in his visit to Langston Castle; and though it was repressed by Lord Langston, yet finding willing hearers in the Trelawneys, and perhaps in Lady Euphrasia, to say nothing of the absence of the party concerned, he indulged to the utmost such powers as he possessed, at the expense of the citizen aristocrat. Returned now to college, he found his old butt, though with a new face; and having long ascertained his weak point, he practised all the arts of exclusiveness against him—strange to say, with success. If they met in company, he sneered; if in the quadrangle, he sneered; if in the hall, where he sat at a high table and passed Robert at a low one, he exceed-

ingly sneered. Was this to be borne by a man who dared to admire a Lady Melusina, from a man who talked of a "wooden muse?" Yet such, in Robert's mind, was the power of rank and family, to which he knew he never could aspire, that, though he could have felled him with pleasure with his fist, in a war of looks, of manner, of insolent assumption of superiority, he was paralysed, helpless, and subdued. We wish, for the honour of human nature and St. Swithin, that this was not so; but the truth of our history compels the avowal; and, in good sooth, by this one silly weakness, the whole life of a man, in many things so superior, was capable of being embittered, through the accidents of a conventional mode of being, by a person who, left to himself, would have been utterly without significance.

We must leave it to philosophers and reformers to settle this anomaly; but such it is, and so our hero felt it; nor did the fault ever depart from him in after life. So great a disadvantage, indeed, with one of Sterling's particular character, is the *consciousness* of being *under-bred*, that we have known men of first-rate abilities, in different professions, sink into nothing when taken out of them, and yield the palm of ease to impudence and inanity, even greater than that of the honourable person whom we are describing.

We could possibly indulge in a great many wise reflections on this,—or, at least, tell what others have said about self-independence, and the true value of things; by which we might read a lesson to a Sterling how to meet the disdain of a Tylney. But we find it so well done, and in so plain and simple a manner, by a mere caricature, which any body may see for nothing on passing a print shop, that we shall adopt it, and thus save ourselves and our readers a great deal of trouble.

Two persons, a French marquis and John Bull, are sitting snarling at one another. The marquis, all lace and ruffles, is taking a pinch of snuff, and looking with exquisite disdain at John, exclaiming, "*Vous êtes une bête*;" to which Bull, with quite as much contempt, and perfect indifference, bawls out, "You be d—d!"

Were we to rack our brains till Doomsday, we could not give a better account of the matter.

But though Sterling said, "You be d—d!" with excellent good-will in his heart, it was not with indifference. He would have given much to have fastened a quarrel upon Tylney; erected his chest whenever he met him; turned his back if in the same room with him; and committed other fooleries, which denoted his sensitive character, and the power which this fashionable blockhead had over him. But the dandy knew

better than to push things to open war. Positive insult was never offered, and the disdain which occasioned so much uneasiness, being mental, could only be suspected; and while this was so, Tylney was safe. Besides, if he had been a bolder man than he was (as he was once known to say), he could have derived no honour from shooting, or being shot by, "the Dutch gentleman." Things, therefore, remained as they were, and our hero was no hero towards a man a hundred times his inferior.

From this state he was at last, and only by that circumstance, relieved, by the departure of his enemy from college.

He now breathed somewhat freer. His studies went on; he became more and more considered; and his prospects would have opened fairly, if he had known how to shape them. The Principal, still his friend, begged him to decide—the Church, the Bar, or Tuition. He was lost in difficulties, but not such as are commonly experienced. His judgment was balanced, not by the usual estimate of their respective advantages or disadvantages as to the means of advancement in the road to fortune or power, but by the facilities which they might afford to his almost only ambition—the enjoyment of the best company. The visions which had been opened to him at Langston Castle and Castle Derwent had never been one moment

forgotten. He was not, indeed, so foolish as to foster his passion for Lady Melusina with hope; but the images, manners, and conversation, of both her and the duchess were always alive in his memory; by their standard alone he measured all other beings; and he could contemplate no success with pleasure which did not hold out a hope of bringing him in some measure on a level with those divinities of his fancy.

Hence, though a bishoprick was a very good ultimate object if he entered the church, his primary consideration was, in what walk of society he was to pass the long interval of his passage to it. Though he thought, too, it would be a fine thing to be a Chancellor, and lead the House of Lords, much its greatest attraction was the rank in the world, and the intimacies with the great, which it would create; and this he must wait for many a long year, probably to be disappointed at last.

Then as to tuition and university honours, which the Principal, from his own success, recommended;—though Robert had no objection to succeed too, yet all was to depend upon the nature of his situation with, and the rank and consequence of, his pupils. Thus some eminent men had been preceptors to princes of the blood, and combined a court life with the delights of learning. To this he would have no objection,

but did not dare let out that ambition to the Principal.

As to tuition in the families of inferior rank, even of nobility, though, *quasi* nobility, it might be tolerable; yet he had been terrified by an account of a very promising scholar in the college, who had been twelve months established in the family of a marquess, but left it from the shocks that had been given to his self-consequence. "I had expected," said this preceptor, "to dine at table with my pupils; but was turned over to the governess, who treated me completely *en egal*, nay, gave hints of hopes and expectations, which might end in something to our mutual advantage, the very thought of which drove me out of the house. Then, though there was a footman appointed to attend upon our table, and upon me personally, I could never get the fellow to do his duty. It seems his brother footmen did not admit that he was of the same rank as themselves, as they served my lord and my lady—he, only what they called a rum tutor. Who could stay in such an atmosphere? who would not prefer his potatoes, his liberty, and his books at home?"

This completely determined our Robert in regard to a proposal, which the Principal thought sufficiently good to make him. The son of a great coal-owner in the North, who rolled in

thousands, was offered to his entire superintendence, with a stipend of £400 a-year, a quarter of it to be secured for life. But, whatever Sir Robert thought of it (and he thought it, to use his own expression, not to be sneezed at), young Robert despised it as pelf; and as the coal-owner was, in his eyes, scarcely a gentleman, and his daughters any thing but Melusinas, he rejected it with disdain.

For this he was well rated by the prudent Sir Robert, who began to fear that learning was not the productive thing he was told it was when he sent his son to college. He, however, viewed the progress of his friend's son, Wilson, with approbation, to whom the law seemed to promise great things; and he informed Robert, that if he would tread in his steps, money should not be wanting.

Tread in his steps! Alas! we fear it was too late. He loved Wilson, or rather esteemed him beyond all men; but he did not love him as he did Lord Langston.

Why was this? He could not tell. Can the reader?

Well: considering the great prizes of the law,—peerages, wealth, and the very height of fashion *for his posterity*,—he thought he would make a trial; and, having now done with his course at Oxford, and taken a high degree,

he communicated his resolve to his excellent friend the Principal, who, from his continued progress in all academical learning, his honourable candour, perhaps even his very weaknesses (which so much required the assistance of exactly such a protector), had become more and more attached to him.

The doctor highly approved, and desired that on all necessary occasions he would continue to consult him; and with this encouragement, he again became the fellow-student of Wilson; if so he could be called, in regard to one greatly advanced before him in their common object.

In Wilson he was sure to find an able adviser; and sure it was, he much wanted one. The chambers of his special-pleading tutor, to whom his father, according to promise, laid down another hundred, seemed to him the Black-hole of Calcutta; and, sooth to say, Brick Court, in which they were situated, has sometimes appeared to ourselves not much better. The whole neighbourhood of the Temple,—gardens, fountain and all,—seemed to him of the same melancholy character; for who were ever to be seen in those gardens but vulgar nursery-maids, sunning the children of vulgar lawyers, inhabitants of St. Dunstan's and St. Clement's Danes, and all the variety of filthy courts, alleys, and second-

rate inns, which so swarm in that, to him, despised and hideous quarter.

Yet in this he was somewhat different from a late departed genius, who once gladdened a numerous bevy of polite scholars, enthusiastic poets, and brilliant wits; whose taste would not have disgraced that of our bewildered friend, and who, nevertheless, born in the smoke of St. Dunstan's, thought the Strand, as Johnson did Fleet Street, the best, if not the only quarter in which could be encountered the full current of life.

Such was the feeling of Charles Lamb, once dear to his friends, and still dear to the thinking or humorous world.*

Bloomsbury Square was, indeed, of a somewhat better character. But of Sterling's opinion of

* Charles Lamb, of conversational and literary celebrity, born in the Temple, bred at Christ's Hospital, and a mere clerk in the India House; but the friend and favourite companion of Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, and Hazlitt.

During the early part of his life, he scarcely ever stirred, not merely out of London, but out of the precincts of Temple-Bar and the City. Yet he had a flow of soul equal to that of the finest geniuses, and superior to most of the deities of White's or Boodle's.

It is said he retained his love for St. Dunstan's and the neighbouring town streets, nay, the very smoke of London, to the last, because it was the medium most familiar to his vision. (Vide his Memoirs.)

How

that equivocal (it is now a most *unequivocal*) quarter, we have already given some surmises; and the whole law neighbourhood, whether under the name of square, place, fields, or row, gave, to his now-refined imagination, the indications of so many dungeons.

The mental exercises at the desk of a special pleader, after the *literæ humaniores*, were sufficiently nauseous. But this was the least of the suffering: for after the labours of the day (and they were heavy) were over, the relaxation only made the labour worse when he returned to it. It had been hinted to his father and mother, that it was of inestimable advantage to future Lord Chancellors and Judges, to cultivate the families of those of the present time; and, to Robert's eternal dismay, the cards to and from Lincoln's

How well for Robert Sterling, if he could have said the same of St. Swithin's.

There is a sketch in 'Elia,' of the old abandoned South Sea House, and all the associations which, though now empty, it conjures up—which is equal to Addison, (and superior to the best of Washington Irving's). In six or seven pages, it shews an observation and knowledge of the world, and of human life as it exists, or existed in times gone by, and that in a style quite taking to the heart, such as is to be found in few contemporaries. It alone would stamp him with an impress, though born in St. Dunstan's, which Sterling, had he been ever so successful, could never have reached.

Inn Fields, Bloomsbury Square, and Bedford Row, were multiplied upon his mother's table, till the sight of them gave him the jaundice.

An attempt was made, after office hours, to seek higher fortune on horseback in the Park. But as office hours recommenced at six, and there was dinner in the interval, this, too, was effectually circumvented; and the grief and disgust of our unfortunate tyro in law were still more consummate than they had been in the tyro at college.

The distress became most serious. He knew not where to fly for comfort. Far from giving it, nobody could enter into his feelings. Even Wilson failed him: their elements, originally different, had become incompatible.

In this unhappy state, bemoaning his destination, yet afraid to recede,—dead to all the great interests, the liberal views, the research, the magnificent objects involved in the study he had embraced,—the ruling passion of his soul paralysed every other. He longed, he pined for the elysium of the castles of Derwent or Langston; the sight of a lady on horseback, particularly if the steed were a white one, thrilled him with emotion; and a ducal coronet chained up his official faculties, so as for a whole day to render him perfectly useless.

Mr. Longbottom, his *master*, saw fully how

little his mind was where it ought to be; and, after having neglected office hours for a month, and marred every plea intrusted to him, this prince of special pleaders, being a conscientious man, fairly told Robert's father that his son would never make a lawyer.

"What the devil will he make?" was the emphatic reply. "However, if you discard him, I suppose you will return a proportionable part of the premium."

Mr. Longbottom replied, that was a thing never done; and saying he might attend the office if he pleased, took his leave.

The consequence was a long coolness between the father and son, and a threat on the part of the former to stop the supplies.

CHAPTER XIX.

HE TRIES DIPLOMACY.

“Go forward, and be choaked with thy ambition!”

Henry VI. Part i.

It will be recollected that this eventful history opened with a conversation between Sterling and his sister Caroline—a pleasing, natural girl, who knew nothing of finery. The scene was Harwich, and Robert had been left by the sea-shore, pondering his miseries and disappointments in solitude. We have now come to that blank epoch in his life, and would we could say that the disorder which had destroyed all that was healthy in him, was at all in a way to be healed. Little progress indeed had he made towards a cure, though he wanted not the sense to point out where it lay.

But his fate pursued him every where. The only society he would cultivate, either rejected him altogether, or, by not admitting him on his own terms (for he was too proud to be merely tolerated), forced him to reject *them*. On the

other hand, those who would have held his acquaintance an honour, were, in his mind, either deficient in station, pursuits, education, or manners, such as alone could make him happy. The consequence was, that the poor gentleman was in a fair way of having no friends at all.

The duke seemed to have forgotten him through two seasons in London; though, as he knew not what had become of him, and our gentleman was too much on the *qui vive* to present himself at his door uninvited, we see not how he could have remembered him in the way which Robert required.

His other great friend, Lord Langston, had not yet returned from the Continent; and as the same jealousy of temper which always pursued him overcame all temptations, great as they were, to call in Grosvenor-square (perhaps a little fear of the *faute de mieux* aiding and abetting), he remained a mortifying instance of what an ill-regulated self-love, or foolish pride, can effect, to the destruction of many excellent natural qualities.

Things, however, began to look better. While he was at Harwich, Lord Langston arrived from abroad, and called in Bloomsbury-square, leaving a letter desiring to see him. We may suppose that he instantly returned to town, though against his

father's wishes, who declared he should make no more wild-goose chases after lords. But this, with Lady Sterling's help, was overruled.

To do Lord Langston justice, notwithstanding his Norman blood, he was unaffectedly glad to see his friend; and after the usual mutual inquiries were over, he observed, he was sorry he had given up his thoughts of the bar, and particularly for the reason he had given. "You might as well object," said he, "to the noble profession of arms, because a soldier has often to make very dirty marches, or live in very dirty barracks. However," added Lord Langston, "a law education, though not completed, can never do harm, and it might be beneficial towards another profession which I have sometimes thought, particularly while abroad, would suit you. What think you of diplomacy? Not only it will exercise your talents, but, from the perpetually mixing yourself with courts and company of all sorts, it will cure you of all your jealousies and nonsense, which used, you know, to interrupt your comfort."

Sterling was delighted. He liked the proposal, and, we ought to say, liked Lord Langston still more for this proof of his remembrance. But how was the project to take effect?

"Why, there may be some difficulty," said Lord Langston, "for not only we must make

our way at the Foreign Office, which is not easy, but you must get your father to come down still more than in preparing for the Bar. I suppose you know that, for some time, the honour of belonging to an embassy is all the pay you can have, even if we succeed."

A plan so congenial to Robert's favourite aspirations, admitted of no difficulty. He thought only of courts, ministers, and good company; he already began to despise Wilson's choice of a profession, and more than ever shivered with horror at the thought of Brick Court, and St. Dunstan's. We may, therefore, estimate his pleasure when his noble friend, who, though a favourite at court, was no courtier, said he would that instant seek the foreign secretary, *pour sonder le terrain*.

Not to retard our story, we will at once say he succeeded, and that in about a fortnight the knight of St. Swithin's received an appointment to join the Marquess of Avington's embassy, at one of the first-rate courts on the Continent.

Even his father was perhaps a little flattered with this, though he stood out stiffly till the appointment was made.

"It is a little hard, I think," said he, "that all these honours bring no profit, and that every advance towards fortune, as it is called, only

takes more money out of my pocket. The deuce a thing has Robert yet earned, with all his abilities, but fine speeches and a paltry ring, which the blockhead says is invaluable, because given him by a duchess. There is William, who is younger by two years, and has already got a salary at Amsterdam, with a prospect of more."

These little groanings, however, were soon allayed by Lady Sterling's influence ; nor was, perhaps, either parent much displeased, any more than Robert himself, when he was informed that, as he had to appear at foreign courts in his new character, it was necessary that he should first be presented at his own.

This was the greatest incident which his life had hitherto known ; and as his foreign outfit had already incurred the expense of a court dress, and nothing additional was demanded, Sir Robert acquiesced.

We may suppose that uncle George had much to do with this affair ; and as, if he understood any thing, it was a matter of court etiquette, he was really of use. For uncle George seemed the very counterpart of Autolycus :

"Are you a courtier, an't like you, Sir ?

"Whether it like me or no, I am a courtier. Seest thou not the air of the court in these enfoldings ? Hath not my gait in it the measure of the court ? Receives not thy nose court odour from me ? Reflect I not on thy baseness court contempt ?"

Such was not precisely the sort of courtier Robert Sterling would have made, had his fortune been to be born in that, at present, envied rank. Had this been his lot, he would have borne his faculties meekly. It was only because he was not so born that this nonsense overtook him. His love of fine, or high people, was not because *they* were high, but because he himself was low; and the consciousness of his being so, while it was the bane of his life, formed the strongest contrast to his great pride of character. This induced him to pretend *so far* to equality with the highest, that to recede an inch in the exaction of what he thought his due, on the score of personal respect, would have been treason.

His appointment was communicated to him by the under secretary of the Foreign Office, not the secretary himself. This was an affront; but the phraseology of the note of communication was still greater. The under secretary was the son of a peer, and the note began drily with—

Mr. ——— *informs* Mr. Sterling that he is appointed to form part of the embassy to ———.

Had this been from a junior clerk, or if he had been an honourable as well as Mr. —, it would not have given him a thought; but Mr. ——— being an honourable, and Sterling himself *par-*

venu, he was wounded. "*Inform!*" said he, with "scorn; he might, at least, have written that he had the *honour* to inform me."

It is astonishing what bitterness this infused into his manner, when business made it necessary afterwards to have an interview with the under-secretary.

But these trifles, though they show the inconveniences of not understanding one's place, were of little consequence. The effects of the appointment in another, and more tender respect, were serious.

Sterling now "belonged to the king." We may remember how those magic words operated upon Gil Blas; but in Gil Blas, the *parvenu* son of a mere *écuyer*, or usher of a lady of quality, this might be forgiven. Was Sterling then a *parvenu*? Yes! but only because he made himself so.

Well, he now "belonged to the king;" and what did not that promise for an aspiring nature? Not merely establishment, and the chances of high distinction (of which the young heart never doubts), but an elevation of condition which might even justify certain visions (distant indeed, and obscure like twilight shadows, but still visions), which flitted before his eyes, spite of all warnings to the contrary. How imprudent, how useless, how dangerous, say Wisdom

and experience ! How sweet, though it fail, say youth and hope—those dear deceivers !

In a word, Mr. Sterling, no longer the Dutch gentleman, but in the pompous foreign phrase *conseiller d'ambassade*, and “belonging to the king,” with the whole field of politics and diplomacy open to him—stars, and ribbons, and pensions for life—what (though she *was* an earl’s daughter, and of Norman descent) was to prevent his young heart from beating ? To beat only was in itself a pleasure. Ah ! how enviable to those which had done beating, though under stars and embroidery.

Had this been all, therefore, we might forgive him. But, alas ! he went farther, and many an hour did his bed witness him sleepless, yet dreaming, as if Queen Mab had been “athwart his nose.” He would, no doubt, be soon promoted ; he would move an equal in his beloved circle.

Lord and Lady Avington were of the highest consideration in point of consequence ; and their daughters, the Ladies St. Maurice, in point of fashion. They could not, indeed, equal the ladies of Langston Castle—that was impossible ; but if these had tolerated, nay smiled upon him, how might he not pretend to the notice of the others.

But this was the least of his dream. Melusina

began and ended every vision, sleeping or waking. Her notice of him was somehow different from all others; in what he could not tell, but it was sweet to think of, and very different from that of Lady Euphrasia. Why should that be?

Then again, was it true that men of no birth, if of merit, never succeeded with the high-born? The very cloth of frise, quoted by the Principal on this subject, proved that it might be.* Who was the Bertie who, from a simple literary gentleman, married the Duchess of Suffolk? Who was the Duke of Suffolk himself, who married a queen? Who the gentleman usher (not to a queen, but only an ecclesiastic), who, by marrying a great heiress, founded two dukedoms?

All this was sweet to his imagination, and nothing he thought now forbade him (though even without such hopes he had done so a thousand times) from running over every look and word of tolerance (he had almost said of kindness) which had been given him by the frank, the generous, the lovely Melusina.

O! love, love! what sport dost thou make with us! Yet who would not, for the moment, submit to be so sported with, for the joy, though imaginary, which attends the illusion? Here was a youth to fortune unknown, with not a drop of nobility in his veins, but, even in his own

* See page 242.

mind, still reeking with the mud of St. Swithin's, who dared lift his thoughts to one comparatively a princess, and, without a pang of doubt or fear, allowed his fancy to roam on high, and in the language of him who addressed Fancy herself, to exclaim, as he sometimes did,

"The pangs of absence O remove,
For thou canst place me near my love ;
Canst fold in visionary bliss,
And let me think I steal a kiss."*

Had Peter Pindar, however, then been alive, or had then written, it might have been better for Sterling to have quoted him than Wharton ; when, in enumerating the beauties and qualities of the lips of the daughters of George the Third, he ends with this quaint, but mortifying conviction :

"Lips which I never kiss'd, and never shall."

In the midst of these mental dangers, however, as if to give him a still farther chance of recovery, he had the good, or bad fortune, to meet his old acquaintance Miss Sycamore, the lady who, we may recollect, took him under her protection, and endeavoured to enlighten him as to the realities of life at Langston Castle. She was crossing the Park, through Grosvenor-gate, when they met in the gateway, and of course a greeting of recognition followed.

* Wharton.

The meeting was a very friendly one on both sides. Sterling asked leave to join her, with which she was not displeased; and as she had a little of her kinsman, the Principal, in her, she rather piqued herself on knowledge of the world, and was not indisposed to communicate it where the recipient was worthy. She fairly catechized her former protégé, not only on his progress in society, but on the state of his heart. On this he was open enough; and having learned from him that Langston Castle, and the society there, still maintained their places in his memory, and, from certain hints and phrases, discovered that her favourite pupil, Melusina, was more paramount in his breast than ever, she became grave, and little propitious even to the prospects which he told her had now opened upon him.

“As a man of business, or mere ambition,” she said, “they might be tempting; but with your sensibilities (pride and touchiness among them); I cannot say I prophecy much addition to your happiness. In truth, you are the same youthful, inexperienced person you were three years ago; you have too strong a feeling, both of your inferiority and your equality to others, to make your passage easy.”

This was so oracular, and so like her cousin the Principal, that Robert began to question whether it was not himself in petticoats. Seeing,

however, that she really was interested about him, he frankly answered many shrewd questions, and submitted to all her commentaries, particularly on the imprudence of fostering his attachment (now amounting, as her penetration saw, to something like hope) to his paragon, Lady Melusina.

"I do not scold you," she said, "for your admiration of her—nay, I would forgive a little love still lurking in the corner of your heart. Neither do I absolutely condemn you for supposing, that if you were her equal, you might pretend to her. All that is not my affair, but her's; nor do I say (although it may be imprudent to such an aspiring gentleman) that you were disagreeable to her."

Sterling started, and a gleam of joy suffused his whole countenance.

"There now," said she, with a change to sternness, that froze him; "see what it is to risk even a word of encouragement with a man of your composition. When I said you might not be disagreeable to Lady Melusina, did I tell you that, though you were a duke, she could love you? For Heaven's sake lay aside this nonsense, and listen to me as a friend, who, if she tells you rough truths, does it to prevent the shipwreck of your happiness. That you should love Lady Melusina, herself so lovely in mind

as well as person, does not surprise me ; but take my word for it, even if she were inclined to you, which on so passing and ephemeral an acquaintance is impossible, never would she listen (I must speak out) to such a *mésalliance*."

"She is proud, then?" said Sterling, proudly.

"No, no, indeed! she is even modest in her opinion of herself. Lady Euphrasia is proud, but not her sister, who, like pious princesses of old, would wash the feet of the poor. But she is of an aristocratic family, whose feeling against unequal marriages she fully shares."

"She has been prejudiced by Tylney," observed Sterling.

"Far from it; she not only did not encourage, but repressed his sneers against you in your absence. She even told him—"

"What?"

"That it would be better for him (you know her spirits) if he imitated your modest merit."

"God bless her!" said Sterling, and his lip began to quiver.

"I see I have done wrong—very wrong; you are not to be trusted," said Miss Sycamore. "I have undone all I meant to do; and yet nothing is more fragile than the hope I see you will build upon this. Let me, therefore, again speak out, and say that no man, were his merit

ten times your's, would make Melusina think of an unequal alliance."

"Has she not, probably, some preference elsewhere?" said Sterling.

"You have no right to ask," replied Miss Sycamore, almost angrily; "nor would I answer if I knew, which I do not. But it is for your own sake that I have thought it right to set before you, that her mother and sister themselves, to whom I may add your friend, Lord Langston, who really loves you, cannot have a greater sense of the guards to be set to protect their ancient house from being mis-allied, than this otherwise humble, as well as amiable creature."

"And yet one would have thought," answered Sterling, in a tone of something like pettishness, "that the growth of riches all about us, the spread of education, and the liberal views in regard to the equality of mankind, would have opened their eyes to their real position. The times are no longer Norman, whatever their blood. Nor can I sit down quietly under your assurance, were I really to succeed in the honourable career opening to me, that, if this just-minded person were not otherwise unfavourable, she would allow such mere prejudices to frustrate what might be a path to happiness."

"Admirably reasoned," replied the sagacious lady; "and pray, may I ask whether, supposing

even a predilection on her part,—which no doubt (being the growth of three days' acquaintance, succeeded by an absence of three years) must be particularly strong,—you have the modesty to believe that she would wait for you twenty years ; for this it would take to achieve the *éclat* and the wealth you contemplate, which are to place you upon an equality with *her* ?”

Sterling shrank within himself at this nipping question. He found it comprehended the whole subject ; refuted all that could be said for him ; and quenched all the commotion which this *rencontre* and conversation with Miss Sycamore had raised. His countenance fell ; his step faltered ; his hopes fled, even sooner than they had arisen. “ I own,” said he, “ I am a fool ; I will cease to hope ; but Melusina's image my heart will never give up.”

Miss Sycamore, really pitying him, forbore to say more ; but telling him she hoped to hear of his recovery, and kindly shaking him by the hand, they separated.

It is perhaps but right to say, that Miss Sycamore had her reasons for assuming the peremptory and decided tone she did upon this occasion. She had conceived an esteem for Sterling, and had seen the instantaneous and strong impression which her pupil's loveliness and frankness had made upon him. Yet, knowing that the

affability of her natural manners, amounting sometimes to playfulness, and even, as might be thought, to kindness, did not prevent her feeling all the aristocratic principles of her family in regard to alliances, she had been, from the first, anxious that the evident predilection of Sterling might not increase to his destruction. That there might be no mistake, she watched all that passed on this subject, after his departure from the castle, and Tylney's arrival, gave full scope to opinions.

In this Lady Trelawney led the way to much discussion, founded upon Tylney's report. "It was really too bad," she said, "that upstarts should, by false pretences, find their way into places in society to which they had no right; and Lord Langston must pardon her, if she thought him somewhat to blame for having lent himself to such an imposition. I should not be surprised," added Lady Trelawney, "if, upon the strength of such facilities and such encouragement as have been given him, this person, or others like him, should conceive designs which it would shock one to think of."

And she looked at her daughter and the other young ladies, as if agitated by fear.

At this, however, Lady Euphrasia, looking at Tylney, gave a sort of incredulous laugh, as

if the thing was impossible ; and the look and the laugh were returned by Tylney.

The countess, though she did not altogether disagree in the general sentiment, had the justice to qualify it, as to the particular instance before them. " In that respect," she said, " his education and obvious turn of mind, his very backwardness of manner, but, above all, Lord Langston's regard for him, would ensure him from conceiving any such arrogant, not to say dishonourable design. But even if he did," added the countess, bridling, " we should be perfectly safe ; for I am very sure, whatever the merit, no child of mine but would abhor such pretensions."

" I am quite of mamma's opinion," observed Lady Melusina ; but whether in regard to the favourable opinion of Sterling, or the denunciation of his pretensions, if entertained, did not appear.

All this passed among the ladies at their work-table, where Miss Sycamore had a seat, and the harsh sentiments of Lady Trelawney in regard to Sterling, his defence by the countess, and the assent of Lady Melusina, did not escape her. The young lady had, before this, when occasion occurred, expressed her favourable opinion of him, with her usual openness ; and Miss Sycamore

more, who sincerely loved her, became interested to know in what particulars of her mother's opinion she agreed.

A morning walk, *tête-à-tête*, which was very usual with them, afforded her an opportunity of discovering it the next day. Melusina, indeed, never had yet thought of concealing any thing she felt. She was as frank as she was innocent, and Miss Sycamore had only to mention Lady Trelawney and Sterling, to procure all she wanted. "I never liked Lady Trelawney," said Melusina; "and I like her less now, for her uncharitableness. Whatever Mr. Sterling may be, I am sure he is incapable of harbouring such designs as she imputed to him. If he was not too timid, he would be too honourable, as my brother's friend. Besides, though he seems to have been much pleased by his reception, and made himself agreeable in his turn, he never showed any thing to warrant Lady Trelawney's odious suspicions."

"But if he had, and to you—for I put Lady Euphrasia out of the question," said Miss Sycamore.

"Why then—"

"Well!"

"I should have shewn myself my mother's daughter, and my brother's sister, that is all," said Melusina.

They then fell into a discourse upon unequal

marriages, short, but sensible and pithy, wherein this young lady, young and inexperienced as she was, shewed the strong plain sense of her brother, whose mind she often reflected, mingled with all the candour of her own, and all the playfulness of her years. "I like Mr. Sterling," said she, "better than any young man I have yet seen; but were he a duke, I am too young to be addressed. In other respects ignorant as I may be, I am too well convinced of the necessity for a woman's never looking down upon her husband in any thing, in order to be happy, for such an alliance ever to enter my head."

"And yet," said Miss Sycamore, trying her, "though you derive from the Plantagenets, and he from behind the counter, there is no distinction of blood in the eye of heaven."

"Nobody is surer of that than I am," replied the youthful moralist, "and I remember it in all my prayers; but till heaven declares that there is and ought to be the same equality below as on high, we cannot govern ourselves by that opinion, true though it be."

Here she looked grave, as if pondering the subject.

"You quite astonish me, my dear," said Miss Sycamore; "where did you get this philosophy?"

"I believe from my brother first," answered

her pupil, "but afterwards from my own reflections, and particularly on my cousin Mary's marriage."

This cousin Mary had given a lesson to her whole family. She was the only child of a late Earl of Langston, elder brother to Melusina's father, whose mother had died in giving her birth. She had been educated as an heiress, and being a Lady Mary, was much sought after. Nevertheless, being also of a soft and ductile (perhaps we should say of a weak) composition, she so far preferred her immediate feelings to the conventional maxims of society, that she matched with "cloth of frise." Her choice was no other than a young curate of Langston, and (what was worse) one in no way distinguished by either genius or learning. He certainly had never obtained a University prize, and Robert was worth a thousand of him.

There is no accounting for this, except perhaps by what was said of her by her own father, that Mary was always a groveller, forgetful of her rank, and fit only for a plebeian.

The earl died soon after, leaving her mere bread and cheese, with which she dragged on, in truth, a homely and not very respectable existence, with a man who could neither elevate her nor be elevated by her. He never cared for her except for the advantages of the connexion, which

he missed, and she hated him as the cause of a palpable disgrace.

This was an example which the countess was too proud to point out as a *lesson* to her daughters, but as such they both appreciated it; and with all her sweetness and *gâité de cœur*, not less Melusina than Euphrasia.

There was no answering this case, nor, indeed, did Miss Sycamore attempt an answer. She had ascertained all she wanted as to her pupil's mind, and treasured it up accordingly, revealing it only to her kinsman, the Principal, when he made inquiries as to the effect of Sterling's visit to the castle, both upon himself and its inhabitants. From him, in after-life, it travelled to Sterling himself.

Lady Melusina was true to her principles. They were, perhaps, even a little tried. We have seen that she distinguished Robert on their first acquaintance. She thought him not an ordinary person, and the impression did not wear off; although, owing to his own jealousy and Lord Langston's absence, the acquaintance was not renewed. We are even obliged to say, that Miss Sycamore related this critical conversation in the Park to her quondam pupil, whom it not a little affected. To think she had been beloved so long, and yet so hopelessly—in absence, in silence, in solitude, in the world; no break in his feel-

ings; no interruption to his constancy; and particularly the little burst, "I will cease to hope, but with her image I can never part!"—all this, it would be unjust as well as uncandid not to say, gave some even tender emotions to Melusina; who, though so alive to what was demanded of her by her family and by the world, was yet any thing but selfish, and a real daughter of nature.

Yet even this did not break in upon her firmness. It revived the interest she had felt about Sterling; she wished him success in his new prospects, and she would not have been sorry to renew acquaintance with him;—but no more.

Hence, let no man, however sanguine, or whatever his merits or opinion of himself, suppose it easy to overleap the barriers set up by society, to preserve the necessary distinctions between ranks and orders; or because a superior, whether man or woman, smile upon him for the good that may be in him, that therefore the line of demarcation is to be thrown down in his favour. Let this instance instruct him not to expect, from a mere demonstration of good-will and esteem, that a woman will descend from her sphere and fair pretensions, and lower herself in the world for his mere sake. As the moral of this history, therefore, is the danger of not knowing or not being content with our place, I

have been tempted to enlarge upon it in this little episode, though it interrupt the thread of greater events.

To those events we now return, and must attend upon our hero, where having been inspected by uncle George with all a gentleman usher's powers of scrutiny, and found wanting in nothing, he proceeded to the drawing-room.

His heart beat high as he was set down at the gate of the palace,—the identical spot where, a dozen years before, he had imbibed those unfortunate notions which had so coloured his life. It swelled still higher when, in the ante-chamber, he found himself in the midst of graceful men, decorated with stars ; beautiful women waving with plumes ; and felt that he had a right to be among them. Perhaps a young ambition of any kind had never been so gratified. But when he got into the presence, and felt the awful stillness which royalty imposes, he was nearly overcome. Uncle George had long left him, to take his place in the suite of his royal mistress ; and as Lord Langston, who was to present him, had not yet arrived, he felt painfully unprotected in such a crowd of superiors, not one of whom he had ever seen before. He looked with almost anguish in search of Lord Langston, and in his solitude (for such it was, notwithstanding the place,) began to console himself with the thought of his

low origin, and St. Swithin's, in order, we suppose, to do away the effects of the comparison he was making of himself with the brilliant people around him.

In this torture of mind (for it was nothing less), he would have given all he was worth to have seen but one single face which he knew, and to which he might turn for protection,—when lo ! close to him he caught the eye of Lady Euphrasia.

Notwithstanding his wish, this by no means encouraged him ; for, exclusive of there always having been some distance on her part towards him, he was more than ever assailed by his *mauvaise honte* and sense of inferiority, and stood motionless, in the hope of being voluntarily recognized. This it was not his lot to be : on the contrary, her eyes were perpetually averted. He, however, was glad of her presence, because it indicated, he thought, that her brother, and perhaps her family, were not far off ; and accordingly he took courage to look for them :—when, —O, horror !—instead of Lord Langston, he beheld established at Lady Euphrasia's side, in all the forms of a *cavaliere servente*, the hated figure of Tylney himself !—Worse, if possible, even than this—he saw in succession (for they had all come in together) the whole houses of Trelawney and Manvers, who every one (parti-

cularly young Manvers) pushed rudely by, and, in fact, displaced him, which indeed any body might easily have done.

Had this been all, he might have recovered ; but the whispers and sneering smiles of the whole party, which he was sure, he said, would have been a laugh but for the restraint of the presence, cut him to the quick, and deprived him of defence. To quarrel with the men was there out of the question, and though he despised (or thought he did so) most of the women, the proof that he was slighted by Melusina's sister added poignancy to his other griefs. From this he was somewhat relieved at last by the sight of his friend, who whispered apologies for his delay, the more so as he saw his forlorn condition. But all was cut short by the ceremony of the presentation, which took place under the eyes of his band of enemies, who having passed the Queen, stood still for some moments, and heard from the lord chamberlain the cause of his presentation, when his card was read, announcing him as appointed to the embassy at ———

This immediately produced fresh smiles, every one of which was a dagger to the aspirant, who now hated the very thought of a court, as much as he had formerly panted to belong to it.

In their way home, Lord Langston asked him if his sister had spoken to him, and good-

naturedly accounted for her not doing so by her hurrying to catch the Queen's eye, and the restraint which the immediate approach to the presence always imposed ; adding, that she alone of the family was in town, having come up on a visit to Lady Valteline, Tylney's mother.

Robert heard this explanation as a proof of his noble friend's good-nature. What he believed of it, was a very different thing ; but from that hour he cordially hated Lady Euphrasia.

This presentation, so longed for, caused the incipient diplomat three days' bitterness, from which he was only relieved by setting out on his mission ; when, having recovered his elasticity, with a heart still full of hope, notwithstanding a great drawback, he landed at Calais in the way to his destination.

The drawback might have been ominous to one of a less sanguine mind ; for, previous to his departure, having acquainted his old friend the Principal with his having abandoned the law for diplomacy, Dr. Gaston wrote to him a characteristic letter as follows :

Dr. Gaston to Sterling.

" You were a blockhead for quitting the law, and are not fit for diplomacy.

" T. G."

The effect of this did not last long ; for, as we have seen, he combined high aspirations with constitutional humility, and his heart told him he would defeat the prophecy.

Having been provided by Lord Langston with a letter to the Marquess of Avington, recommending him as his personal friend, and bearing testimony to his Oxford reputation, he was received by the ambassador and the marchioness with all the proper favours and ceremonies which belonged to their station.

No small part of the interest of the introduction was kindled by its being extended to three daughters of the marquess, young, and very elegant, at least as far as a languor of manner amounting to almost sleepiness, permitted him to judge ; and they were reposing, one on a superb *chaise longue*, occupied with a volume of Voltaire ; the two others in voluptuous arm-chairs with embroidered footstools, occupied with fine work. They scarcely turned their heads, though they not only opened, but put their glasses to their eyes when he made his bow ; and at least showed a wish to inspect their future inmate. It seemed, however, that it was only his person that excited their curiosity ; for not one word was uttered on either side ; and the silence seemed relieved by the entrance of a young man in great *deshabille*, but of a very

distinguished air, who saluted all the company, particularly the young ladies, with most perfect ease and familiarity.

This was the Honourable Mr. Mauleverer, the secretary of embassy, to whom Robert was introduced, and his protection for him claimed by the marquess.

Mr. Mauleverer made him a most condescending bend of the chin ; but the silence continued unbroken, till he turned to the young ladies, and asked what they had been about all the morning, and whether they had recovered the last night's ball ? They all instantly laid aside their books and work, and made up for the previous silence by absolutely chattering with Mr. Mauleverer, upon the different incidents of the night,—condescending to reproach him for his laziness in never dancing.

“ O heavens !” he replied, “ the amusement is rather too plebeian in the dog-days ; and besides, I am overlaid with office work ; for my lord, there, is determined I shall not be idle ; and to write all day, and dance all night, is rather too much for my weak shoulders.”

This was thought so lively by the young ladies, that it was rewarded with a titter.

All this while our Robert was left to himself, to make out as he could the character of his companions. The young ladies were so occupied

with Mr. Mauleverer, that they did not seem to know any body else was in the room ; the marchioness was absorbed with knotting in a recess ; and the ambassador with the dispatches which had been brought by Sterling

That young gentleman soon began not to like his situation ; for the comparison he was forced to make between himself and Mauleverer, particularly in the notice taken of him by the ladies St. Maurice, by no means redounded to his credit with himself, either as a visitor or a *commis* ; while the negligently-dressed secretary, in his loose morning costume, seemed all in all to these young persons, who had become perfectly awake from the moment he came into the room.

“ What a happy man,” thought Sterling, “ to be so favoured !” and the opinion was not weakened when Lady Euphemia, the eldest of the sisters, said familiarly, “ come—get yourself ready—for you know you are to ride with us, and there is nobody puts me on my horse so well as you.”

CHAPTER XX.

A SECRETARY OF EMBASSY.—MR. STERLING
OUT OF HUMOUR.

“ Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly dress’d,
Fresh as a bridegroom, and his chin new reap’d,
Showed like a stubble land at harvest home.
He was perfumed like a milliner.”

Henry IV., Pt. i.

Cholmondeley Mauleverer was the son of an English peer, and, by his mother’s side, the nephew of a duke. He was eight-and-twenty, and by dint of his connexions in the House of Lords, and being his father’s heir, added to *decent* talents and the quintessence of dandy manners, went over the heads of half a dozen secretaries of legation, to become secretary of embassy at the court of ——. Indeed, in addition to these acknowledged qualifications for the post, he was powerfully backed by the solicitations of the ambassador himself, who was urged thereto by solicitations equally powerful, on the part of his wife the mar-

chioness, and his daughters, the ladies St. Maurice. This made him the envy of all his rivals, and, with such accomplishments for diplomacy and marriage, he was considered by far the most rising young man of the age.

It is obvious, however, that this gentleman was not the sort of companion-in-arms to make our friend Robert happy; nor, as far as he could prognosticate from his reception, did he anticipate any great delight from belonging to any part of this diplomatic family. He found he had little or nothing in common with them. The qualification of the marquess for his high post depended chiefly upon his being a man of quality, and that the post itself required much representation, but little knowledge of business. He had sufficient urbanity not to be disagreeable, and showed to Robert the exact attention due to his appointment, and no more.

The marchioness was not uncivil, but cold in the extreme to all, except Mr. Mauleverer, whom she, and all her daughters, treated as *enfant de famille*. Robert could take nothing amiss; but ah! how unlike the duchess, or even Lady Langston!

Then, as for the three ladies, Euphemia, Paulina, and Gertrude! ——— but they will speak for themselves.

The day of his arrival, the *embryo* secretary

dined with his chief; and his *debut* was not favourable, either for his nerves or his ambition. The marquess asked him to do him the favour of sitting at the lower end of the table, in order to carve; but the poor fellow had never carved even a leg of mutton, and all eyes were upon him. The natural eyes possibly he could have borne; but all the three ladies St. Maurice were blind, and their eternal glasses were levelled at his exertions, evidently not successful, and this only increased his trepidation. Two or three foreigners of distinction, who were at table, pitied his most pitiable predicament, and one of them, who had been in his youth an aide-de-camp to a great commander, offered to relieve him from the back-bone of a hare, saying, good-naturedly, it had been "*bien son metier*." But this the marquess would not allow, and motioned the *maitre-d'hôtel* to take it to the side-table; which occasioned more play than ever to the hateful glasses, through which Robert's blushes and *mauvaise honte* did not, certainly, show to advantage.

To do Mr. Mauleverer justice, he offered to take his office for him; but this only made his awkwardness still more noted; and, besides, he was sitting by Lady Euphemia, and the marchioness desired him not to stir.

In the evening, when the foreigners were gone,

mon-places, that there was no getting within them. His lady was always well-dressed, and alive to Mr. Mauleverer's attentions to her daughters, but cold to every thing else; and if her court duties, in all the varieties of etiquette, were well got over, she had no further interest about any thing.

As to the daughters themselves, the eldest was evidently too much occupied with another; the second, with herself; and the youngest, with a design to plague the knight of St. Swithin's with disagreeable questions; and all this gave him little hope of impressing them in his favour. Altogether, he was any thing but happy, though belonging to an embassy at one of the greatest courts in Europe.

The next day his condition was far from improved. Three or four other young diplomats introduced themselves as his companions. They all had heard that he had gained the prize for Latin verse at Oxford; all, too, that he had sprung from St. Swithin's. How things travel! This had come from Lady Euphemia, who had it from Lady Euphrasia, who had it from Mr. Tylney. Well:—one said that he feared he would find Greek and Latin of little avail in the mission, but supposed he wrote excellent French, which was the thing to go over the world with. Another asked him, if he had brought his horses

with him, without which man was nothing, especially with the ladies St. Maurice, who were always on horseback. A third said, the English had established a cricket-club; and only hoped he was a good bowler, which was very much wanted.

Robert thought these last were not the exact qualifications required for diplomacy; and owned that he was but an indifferent Frenchman, had no horses, and never played at cricket; at which all his brother *commis* laughed, and only wondered how he ever could have thought of diplomacy.

But though they did not inspire him with much fear of their talents, they were all his superiors in connection and fashion, so far as to assume the unreal ascendancy which such persons always were able to acquire over his consciousness of half-breeding. One was the son of an old baronet; another of a general; and another of a minister, not in, but very near the cabinet. All, when in London, lived in the atmosphere of Bond Street or May Fair. The difference between them was insurmountable.

Once, and once only, our hero was offered a place in the ambassadress's box at the Opera—an honour only conferred by invitation. He went, and had the honour of sitting by himself in the back seat, while a whole round of *élégantes*,

in succession, but particularly Mr. Mauleverer, engaged the attention of the ladies, who did not seem to know he was of the party.

But if this was his situation with the ladies, what was it with the high-soaring and highly-favoured secretary himself?

He was not either so ill-natured, or so ill-bred, as Tylney; but it was easy to discover that the son of old Sterling, a city knight, of St. Swithin's, ought not to have come "betwixt the wind and his nobility;" in short, that he thought him out of his place in being attached to an embassy where fashion and high manners were far more in requisition than simplicity of character or distinguished scholarship. This might easily have been collected from his manner towards Robert; sufficiently civil to be not the reverse; but altogether indifferent and unconfiding, as if his absence would have been a relief. One week, however, proved Mr. Mauleverer's opinion beyond all doubt.

The cabinet in which Sterling wrote, opened upon a walk of the garden beneath; and here Mauleverer was heard by Sterling himself, in conversation with Lady Euphemia, in which he found himself thus pleasantly mentioned:—"I wonder," said Mauleverer, "how Lord —— (naming the foreign secretary), could have

made such a mistake as to send him here, where he is so totally out of his element."

"Oh!" said Lady Euphemia, "it is entirely owing to that formal primitive Lord Langston, who is his friend. Euphrasia told us it was just the same at the castle; though they found him rather agreeable, *faute de mieux*."

Mauleverer laughed, but added, "Yes! but here, where there is no *faute de mieux*, he had better have stayed away. There seems no harm in him; and he may even have merit, but not of the sort to go down here. He might have done very well in the West-Indies, or as an *attaché* in Switzerland, or even in Sweden. But perhaps he may find his mistake, and leave."

Here the lady and gentleman passed on, and no more was heard. The feelings of Sterling may be imagined; the pen fell from his hand; he sought the garden, and appeared no more that day at the hotel of the British embassy.

CHAPTER XXI.

HE RESOLVES TO FLY.

“How does your Grace?”

“Why, well.

Never so truly happy.

I know myself now, and I feel within me

A peace above all earthly dignities.”

Henry VIII.

“AND am I this despised and incapable being?” said he, as he wandered about the walks; “and is a palace, open to so many, surely not my superiors, to be closed only to me?”

This was not his bitterest reflection. The idea that he too, like Mr. Trippet, had been tolerated at Langston, only *faute de mieux*, almost drove him mad, till he recollected that this came only from Lady Euphrasia, and that Melusina might still think of him with something like respect.

That thought pleased; but then again he recollected all that had passed with the shrewd observing Principal, not only upon the danger

of a *mésalliance*, but upon the hopelessness of it with Lady Melusina herself. He, indeed, had never forgotten the prophetic words: "Be assured, that though she was glad to hear you quote Spenser on the nightingale, and danced with you, not merely *faute de mieux*, in regard to love and marriage she is the Countess's daughter, and the Earl's and Lady Euphrasia's sister."

These words had always pressed like a lump of lead upon his heart; nor were they lighter now, from the associations which his new acquaintances had created. "A curse," said he, in agony of feeling, "upon my vile and wretched silliness, which can so put me in the power of any one. I will break through this spell, which is only of my own creating. Of what consequence is it to me that she should think well or ill of me, or think of me at all? When shall I ever see her again? or if I do, in what character but that of a poor and distant worshipper, unworthy to mix with her family, or perhaps to be thought of more than I am here. Why, why, are these inequalities in lots, where such an insect as Tylney can revel in sunshine, and myself must sink into gloom and obscurity?"

This question he could not answer; and he could only get rid of the thought of Melusina, by vowing never to think of her again.

In order to ensure this, he resolved to break off altogether with her brother, whose family pride, notwithstanding his thousand merits, he had never, as we have observed, ceased to remember, since his eventful conversation with the Principal upon that point.

But this was the least of his present troubles. His fate had pursued him from England to the Continent. The lesson he had just heard from Mauleverer rang in his ears. Had the ambassador been a prince of the blood, and his daughters princesses, they could not be less accessible, or more impenetrable to him. They might not be rude: though he was not sure as to Lady Gertrude—but it was clear he could make no way on his own account. He was tolerated as an official, imposed upon them by authority, but he was scarcely not insulted; and it was clear he never could be considered but as the knight of St. Swithin's.

Here, like the great enemy of all, in his mortified and almost relenting state, when, on the sight of the sun, he reflected upon his rebellion, he exclaimed—

“ Ah ! had His powerful destiny ordain'd
Me some inferior angel, I had stood
Then happy ; no unbounded hope had rais'd
Ambition.”

So thought Satan, when he pondered what

might have been his fate had he never been ambitious ; and so thought Sterling.

These reflections sank deep, and it was the first time they really had done so ; for he now felt the force of the wise Gaston's last letter, telling him he was not fit for diplomacy ; as if he prophesied the very catastrophe which had now happened.

He thought, too, of the firm-minded Wilson's frequent admonitions, and his foolish contempt of them. " What airs have I given myself ! " said he, " towards that attached friend and wise adviser—as superior to me as that sun to the surrounding planets."

It had taken years to bring Robert Sterling to this conclusion, but he was now approaching to it. And yet he was not flattered by thinking how much this was owing to the opinions he had heard from such beings as Mauleverer and Lady Euphemia, whom he never would allow, in his own mind, to be more than a couple of dandies, male and female.

Nor was he far wrong ; for neither of them, if deprived of the adventitious aids which fortune had given them, would ever have risen beyond whatever sphere they were born in.

Here was more food, therefore, for inquiries into human nature, by our disappointed son of ambition. Disgust and mortification, indeed,

often make a philosopher ; and Robert Sterling thought now he was about to prove it.

One good attended his present self-examination, which had never attended any other. He did not prevaricate to his own mind. He saw the truth, and did not wish to elude it. He resolved to meet it boldly.

After a long investigation, therefore, of his precise condition, which lasted till midnight, he determined to fly ; and that he might leave no opening for retreat, before he retired to rest he wrote a letter to his sagacious friend, the Principal, of which the following is an extract.

After describing many of the particulars we have related, he went on to say :—

“ You told me I was not fit for diplomacy ; and though I ventured to doubt, and embarked in it, you were, as usual, right. I certainly am not fit to encounter the gross ill-breeding I have met with in this family,—whether springing from diplomacy, or their own nature, I pretend not to say. Lord Avington is pompous and protecting—which I expected ; but all the rest are rude and insulting—which I did *not* expect. How does it happen, that good company and good breeding are not the same things ? The first, these fine people are esteemed all the world over ; to discover in them the last I have in vain essayed. We have a secretary, the king of dan-

dies, who lets no one approach his royal dignity ; and ladies who think they show their quality by being rude, contemptuous, and neglectful.

“ But I am mildness itself in my expressions. Thanks to you, I feel superior, in essentials, to every one about me ; nor can I fasten upon any one specific thing as an open affront ; and yet I feel insulted every hour. You yourself would not wish me to bear this ; you yourself would tell me immediately to fly. This I have resolved to do, unless you forbid me ; and in a few days the world will probably be once more before me, ‘ where to choose ; ’ and would to God I could be sure that Providence would be my guide.

“ Your grateful,

“ ROBERT STERLING.”

‘To this decided letter the Principal instantly replied, and a fortnight brought him the following characteristic answer :—

Principal Gaston to Sterling.

“ What I foresaw has exactly come to pass, though sooner than I expected. But my prophecy was founded upon general observation of your own character, without the aid drawn from the character of the family in which you have been placed. Any body that knows any thing of the great world, knows the old people to be dull

and common-place, in an unusual degree; and the young ones, spoilt and malapert children, who would behave to you exactly as they have done; and as to Mauleverer, though superior to your old enemy, he is only different by being at the head of what, in modern jargon, are called the Exclusives.

“ Cannot these be resisted, you will say? Yes, certainly; but not by *you*. Why not? Merely because you are not able to handle their weapons; and though you have better of your own, you choose to lay them aside, and fight them with theirs. You also allow them to choose their own field of battle. What good general ever did this?

“ Leaving metaphor, *you*, being in a very middling rank of life, with your fortune to make, and homely connections, choose to aspire to equality with those who are, *in these respects*, undoubtedly your superiors; and this it is that shocks you.

“ Are there, then, to be no superiors—no distinctions in rank? If there are, Mr. Mauleverer was right in saying you ought to have gone to the West-Indies.

“ But you will say, there ought to be no distinction in manners, in behaviour, in good breeding: and I say so too. If, therefore, this Mr. Mauleverer, and his silly allies, forget them-

selves by treating you with ill-breeding, why the fault is with them, and there I would leave it. What would you say to yourself if a mob should hoot and insult you, and you pouted and swelled at them like a turkey-cock? Would you not rather think them what they are, and leave them to their supposed triumph?—Just so with these great vulgar. By not feeling their indecorum, you deprive them of all power, and their affronts are ‘*telum imbelles sine ictu.*’

That *they* are the vulgar, not *you*, ought to satisfy you; and that they are so, I have, if it were wanting, authority from your amiable duke, even when a young man, and therefore perhaps liable to what you call dandyism. In this very place, a companion, his inferior in degree, complaining that he cut him, he said to him, with true dignity, “Why do you affront me by imputing to me a thing so vulgar?”

“But the truth is, you have, like Wolsey, ‘an unbounded stomach,’ and ever would ‘rank yourself with princes,’ who, like most princes, are jealous of intruders, and will not admit you of their mystery. The fault, therefore, is in yourself, for giving them this advantage.

“True, you will say, but their advantage is adventitious, and not derived from themselves. But does that make a difference? Are not most advantages of fortune adventitious? Our duty

is to take care that these advantages press not upon us, so as to hurt us : and this you have not done. A cannon loaded is a terrible thing in itself; but when not pointed against us, it is to us, nothing. Nobody would have pointed his cannon against you, had you not courted it, and marched up to its very mouth. If you do this, have you, a right to complain that the gunner with his match in hand is more powerful than you, though in muscle and limb you may be the strongest ?

“ In the schools at Oxford, or the Courts, had you pursued the law, you would have beaten Mr. Mauleverer all to pieces, had he been as injudicious as you have been, and engaged in a contest to which he was unequal.

“ Where he is, he is impregnable, at least by you ; yet you think your honour is concerned to enter the lists with him.

“ Suppose he had been a rope-dancer, instead of a secretary,—would your honour be concerned to equal him in rope-dancing ?—or if he then turned his back on you, would you deplore your inequality ?

“ I do not mean that Mr. Mauleverer literally turned his back upon you (that would have been a tangible affront), nor that the ladies *spoke* insulting things, whatever they might look. Had this been so, you were at least on such terms of conventional equality that you would have had

a right, nay were bound, to show your sense of it.

“As a clergyman, I do not go so far as Chesterfield, and say, if a man positively insults you, knock him down; but I do say that *then* your expressed resentment would be legitimate. As it is, all that I make out of your grievance is, that you meet with coldness, want of confidence, and *hauteur*, where you expected (what you had no right to be sure of) warmth, deference, and attention; and if you cannot force these, you will fly.

“Fly, then, by all means, as you would fly any other nuisance; but think it only a nuisance which you can avoid, and do not pout about it, particularly as it was one of your own seeking.

“Your question as to the distinction between good breeding and good company, which springs out of this untoward situation, is not unnatural. But neither should it puzzle you. It would not be easy to define *good company*, according to the understanding of it by the world;—and this, if only because there are so many different worlds which erect themselves into judges upon the subject.

“What may be good company with me, may be execrated by another. Some suppose that titles cannot fail to confer the distinction, whatever the manners; others, with more reason, but

still not successfully, assign it to manners alone, whatever the calling. That cannot be, as long as the standard of manners itself is so different in different classes and different countries. The good manners of an Englishman at Paris might be doubtful, and *vice versâ*. The manners of tradesmen are looked down upon by merchants; of mere merchants, by nobility, or those, noble or not, who call themselves men of fashion. The good company of the law are not admitted to be so by the subscribers to the Opera, or Mrs. Cornelis;* and the City is generally neglected by the West End. I even remember a French teacher who asked me to patronize him among the young men here; assuring me, by way of recommendation, that he had always kept good company. This, upon inquiry, I found was the company at an eating-house, the Thirteen Cantons, in Seven Dials, where he always dined.

“Hence, unless we explain what we mean by this most ambiguous phrase, we shall never understand one another; as in general it means only those individuals with whom we are linked together in the same society, who have the same education, modes of thinking, and maxims of conduct. Thus, when Hume, anxious about his Essays, says with self-satisfaction, that he found by Warburton’s railing that the books began

* The Almacks of the time.

‘to be esteemed *in good company*,’ he meant such company as he himself chiefly esteemed, liked, and associated with.

“What you and I, therefore, or Lord Langston, may esteem good company, may be very different from what Mr. Mauleverer, or Lady Euphemia, or my lord ambassador himself, may consider as such ; and though they may, as you say, be acknowledged by all the world to come within the definition, it must be for something greatly in addition to their mere titles or fortunes, however much these may add to their consideration, *united* with such addition. Were they brutes in personal manners ; did the ambassador or his secretary habitually swear, get drunk, or degrade themselves by any public indecency ; or were the ladies, instead of being merely languid and indifferent, though affectedly so, rough hoydens, or something worse ;—not all their titles or magnificence would give them a claim to be called good company. They would be high among the great vulgar, and that is all.

“I need not tell you that a marquess, *qua marquess*, or the power of driving half a dozen coaches and six, and nothing more, is not on that account *alone* an object of consideration.

“On the other hand, *negation* of particular merits, if nothing more than negation, will not deprive them of the advantages they cannot help,

—such as birth, title, and fortune; to which, while the lots of mankind are allowed to be unequal, they have assuredly a right.

“It follows, then, that good company may be of a very mixed character, and its members may enjoy very different degrees of estimation. It may be full of inequalities, both as to rank, to fortune, and to mind and accomplishments; and what is wanting in one, may be made up by the other.

“Hence, too, distinguished merit in the learned professions or liberal arts, if unalloyed by coarseness of manners, gives its possessor a right to equality in the social intercourse with persons far beyond them in the gifts of fortune; and a poet or a painter may form a part of good company, as well as a duke. Goëthe, in the land you are in, though *roturier*, and in a country full of prejudices as to birth, was always thought an ornament of the literary court, that is, of the *good company* of Wiemar.

“If I have made this understood, it may perhaps account for the nice shades of distinction that exist between good company and good breeding, which, you see, are not convertible terms. For though with *good breeding* you can hardly fail of being in reality *good company*, you may be *ranked* among good company, without in reality having good breeding. Your secretary

and his shallow friends may, for the reasons I have given, be classed among the first; but, as you have shown, they may be totally devoid of the second.

“The reason is to be found in the very nature of good breeding, which, or I am much mistaken, *must* be founded in good sense, and so far in good-nature, that though it is possible it may *exist*, it cannot be carried to perfection, without it. Good sense, however, so as on occasions to ensure self-possession, is its essence, its *sine quâ non*. For though I have known many a wise man not well-bred, I never knew a really well-bred man a fool. The reason is, that to have good-breeding, you must never lose your self-possession; and to be always self-possessed, is always to have your senses about you.

“Another, and most essential part of good breeding is, to be always careful to avoid giving pain, or rather always to study to put your company at ease with themselves; and hence it has been well called artificial good-nature.

“But, if the fiction can do so much, how much more may be done by the reality? Good sense and good-nature, therefore, conjoined, cannot fail to produce good-breeding: I mean the thing, not the effigy of it, as found in mere conventional manners—which any blockhead may ape. Hence, if there can be no good-breeding

without good-nature, real or artificial, an ill-bred man is generally (though not as a logical consequence) an ill-natured one; and a well-bred man can never lose his temper, any more than his presence of mind.

“Now to apply this. It should seem that your people are any thing but well-bred, though they may figure in the pageants of the world as good company: and thus your difficulty is solved.

“But if they are not well-bred, or rather if they are ill-bred, need I ask you whether you should feel mortified by such persons? Their rank gives them no claims over you, for more than that ceremonial of respect which it injures not your self-consequence to the very last iota to pay: while their conduct deprives them of all inward respect on your side; which, without departing from conventional forms, you may easily let them see. Your independence, and even your pride, therefore, may be safe if you please, though you may choose to remain. Whether you ought so to choose, being a matter so entirely your own, it is for you, not me, to decide.

“Confess that, in thus attending to your humours (I might say, your waywardness), I treat you better than you deserve. You have, indeed, so often rebelled against prudence and my advice, that I might justly leave you to your fate,—which, if I do not much err, is *to be thrown*

away—and that *at sixty*, when you have fallen into the ‘sere and yellow leaf,’ men will point at you as one who *might* have done well, if he had pleased.* This I believe ; but there is something in you which I cannot abandon, and which makes me sign myself still

“Your well-wisher,

“THOS. GASTON.”

* The introduction to this work shows what a sage observer this extraordinary Dr. Gaston was.

CHAPTER XXII.

HE GIVES NOTICE TO QUIT.

“ Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride.”

Hamlet.

THE receipt of the Principal's letter produced no little satisfaction in Sterling's mind. He had been upon tenter-hooks till he received it, and could hardly wait its arrival to enforce his resolution of retreating.

He was now confirmed in all his resolves, and far more at his ease as to his estimate of the people who had disgusted him.

Of the marquess he made little account ; of the marchioness less ; and they at least demonstrated the emptiness of high state and fortune, when unaccompanied by any thing else, to produce consideration for the holders of them. But the marked indifference of Mauleverer, and the distinction he made between him and his better-connected colleagues, stung him ; and not the less, because he found that his literary attainments among them all seemed to do him more harm

than good. Indeed all of them appeared more able, as well as more inclined, to invent a new tie of a neckcloth, than to feast on a passage in Homer or Virgil, or even to unravel a question in diplomacy.

If this was his situation among the men, it was worse with the women, who seemed to regard him as an absolute nonentity; while Mauleverer engrossed their more than smiles, in a manner so undisguised, that the world came in for its full share of knowledge of their partiality for the happy secretary.

All this only whetted Sterling's resolution to leave a field so unprofitable of honour, pleasure, or advantage; and he began to be really alive to the folly of his attachment to views so little belonging to his natural sphere. But the difficulty now was, how to carry his resolution into effect. After all that had been done for him by Lord Langston, and the interest expended in his service, to throw it all away, and in a pet of caprice, as it would seem, to fling it in his face,—this could not be justifiable on any principle of common good conduct, much less of gratitude. The marquess, at least, had not *appeared* to despise him; with the marchioness he had not exchanged five words; and to tell them he did not like their daughters, or Mauleverer, would neither be politic or decorous,

It must be owned, if he had recalled his resolution, at least for a time, he might not have been thought very blameable. Prompted, however, by his new-raised courage, caused by Doctor Gaston's letter, and his feelings of bitterness at the slights of the last Opera, he made a vow never more to trust himself in company with the ladies St. Maurice. They might bestow themselves, their favours, or their neglects, on others, for him. Though he, therefore, attended the office till he knew how to break away from it, he avoided the dinner and the drawing-room so constantly, that Lord Avington began to take notice of it.

"I hope," said he, "nothing has happened to annoy this young man. This may not be exactly the place for him to throw off in; but he is in the king's employ, and we ought not to discountenance him."

The young ladies tittered; Mr. Mauleverer gave a dry sort of smile; which was returned by Lady Euphemia, who said, "O! I dare say, if he is affronted, he will soon come round."

Not so soon, however, as her ladyship expected, or even might, in a possible case, have wished:—for Lady Euphemia was, after all, a coquet; and a coquet is an undefinable character, or at least subject to no rules.

Thus, though a marquess's daughter, she was

flesh and blood, and subject, like any other flesh and blood, to all human feelings, little and common, as well as great and commanding. Besides—

“ She was a woman, therefore to be won.”

And we are also told that woman is divided by two great passions,

“ The love of pleasure and the love of sway.”

Which is the most impetuous may be doubtful, but at least the last is so engrossing, as to become a Helluo; and rather than not be admired, a duchess will sometimes angle for the eyes of a shopkeeper.

I have heard, indeed, of a fine town lady going to a country church, in order to turn the heads of all the bumpkins; which she did, all save one, who would not even look at her. Piqued, and resolved to conquer, though the contest was so inglorious, she played off every art that she would have used in a drawing-room. Still, to her astonishment, and even mortification, she could not succeed. After the service, the riddle was explained; for she saw the impenetrable clown *led out* of church by a friend. The insensible was—blind!

We are sorry to affront our hero by the application of such a story; but most certain it is that, Mr. Mauleverer having been detached on

the business of a week to a neighbouring court, the attentions of all the other young men became acceptable ; and among them, if he had offered them, would have been those of the slighted Sterling.

“ The Dutch gentleman,” was however inexorable ; and one day, Lady Euphemia meeting him in the garden, and actually dressing herself in smiles, the conversation he had overheard between her and Mr. Mauleverer came across him so forcibly, that (O shame to gallantry !) he pretended not to see her, and turned into another walk when within arm’s length.

Lady Euphemia’s mollified feeling instantly fled, and she became more contemptuous than ever. Robert, however, was now beyond her power ; for, acting upon his resolution, he had worked himself up to the declaration of it to Lord Avington, and, to the latter’s astonishment, asked for his *congé*.

The marquess heard him with cold politeness ; hoped he had met with nothing disagreeable in his family ; allowed he was the best judge of his own affairs ; and would be glad if he found some other mission more agreeable to his views.

His departure was fixed, and he was pressed to dine with the ambassador the day before he went, — which, with high notions of insulted dignity, he declined. For this he afterwards

blamed himself, and allowed, in talking it over with his friend Wilson, that it arose from wounded vanity rather than independence.

And what did he get by it? The day he left, he was quizzed both by the ladies and the young men, as the doughty knight of St. Swithin's, and in twenty-four hours more was utterly forgotten.

Robert Sterling's residence in this family was upon the whole a bitter lesson; and he beguiled the journey home in pondering—what had now become his favourite subject—the inequalities of mankind. Why such a being as Lord Avington should be created to be a marquess and an ambassador, and himself to bend his body at his nod; why a set of shallow young ladies, such as he had left, or a dandy secretary, like Mauleverer, should have the power of turning up their noses at him with impunity, and cause him the undefinable mortifications he had suffered, merely because he had been born in St. Swithin's, and his father lived in Bloomsbury Square;—all this was an inextricable puzzle to his philosophical research, and lasted all the way to Holland. But not a little shocked was he with himself, when, in passing through the wine countries of the Rhine and in France, he beheld dancing vigneron, after labour done, in all the jollity of carelessness and present ease, though

almost squalid with poverty. "Good heavens!" cried he, "is there so little difference in station, on the question of happiness? Is it pride alone that causes the struggles we undergo, and which we certainly create for ourselves? 'Take physic pomp,' and make me like one of these. In what are the Avingtons or Mauleverers of the world the superiors of these poor but cheerful people, except that they do not wear patched petticoats or trowsers,—which the others do, and feel it not."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE THINKS OF COMMERCE.

“Like a German from the waist downwards, all slops.”

Much Ado about Nothing.

WE have seen in the last chapter how our tyro (for tyro in the world he still certainly was) reasoned with himself during the weary miles that spun out his journey; and he wore through the days, now comforted now moody, but always dissatisfied with himself.

At times he was such a convert to his new notions of the inefficacy of rank or fortune to elevate character, or make people happy, that he actually once thought of overcoming all his prejudices, and complying, late as it was, with his father's wish, of going to Amsterdam. He was, in fact, now so near it,—having reached Rotterdam, in his way to England,—that he resolved to stretch over, and see how brother William looked, with a pen behind his ear; and, curiously enough, he found him in that very situation.

As the counting-house of Messrs. Pye, Rich, and Wilkieson, was easily known, he went there without notice. To be sure, he felt a pang more poignant than he liked, or thought possible, when, taking out his card to announce himself, he beheld upon it, for the last time, ornamented with many foreign flourishes, M. Sterling, *Conseiller de l'Ambassade de l'Angleterre*. But he swallowed the dose as well as he could ; and, in a fit of disgust, giving all diplomacy to the devil, scattered the rest of his cards to the winds.

His name produced instant admission, and one of the partners, at his request, conducted him into the counting-house, in order, as he had planned, to catch his brother by surprise.

He found the young gentleman, as we have stated, with the dreaded pen behind his ear. He was seated upon a high stool, amid some dozen or fourteen brother clerks, all of them absorbed in the deepest attention, over ponderous tomes, any one of which two of them could hardly lift.

William Sterling had already put on much of the Dutch merchant. Nay, the appellation of "Dutch gentleman" did not seem at all inapplicable to *him*, either in dress, figure, or countenance. He seemed as heavily built, particularly about the stern, as one of his own ships ; and his large and ponderous limbs were not made

lighter to the eye, by a mass of roomy clothes, which seemed made for the convenience of much in-door work. His face corresponded : he was barely one-and-twenty, yet his brow was full of care ; invoice seemed written on his forehead ; and though his gills were rosy and sleek, his cheek was as if unaccustomed to smile.

Robert was sincerely glad to see his brother ; but nothing of this escaped, nor could he prevent an uncomfortable feeling, when he thought what would be the sensation of a Tylney or a Mauleverer, were they ever to catch him as he now did his brother.

On the other hand, that brother did not appear in the smallest degree affected by it. He was *dans son métier*, and loved it. Far therefore from being ashamed to be so found, he would have felt disgraced if he had been discovered with a Horace before him, instead of his ledger. This he afterwards told his brother,—who did not fail to make very proper reflections upon it, though unfortunately without any practical effect.

The meeting between the brothers was characteristic of both :—Robert animated, pleased, and shewing that he was so ; William pleased, but sedate, and not a little observant ; as it should seem, of the eye of the partner who presided in this room ; in fact, fearful that if there was a

scene, it might interrupt business. To avoid this, he proposed a walk with his brother, but first asked leave of his chief,—observing, by way of inducement to give it, that he could, in the course of it, deliver a number of bills for acceptance, received that morning.

“Do so,” said the chief; “and we will not require you to appear again till to-morrow.”

“No, Sir,” said William, “the casting of the ledger will then be suspended.”

Robert did not fail to remark this, and again thought (though he hated himself for it) of the Avingtons. The brothers then proceeded upon their excursion, before which, Mr. Pye, the chief partner, whose turn it was to give a dinner that day, pressed them both to dine with him, which was accepted.

“And you are perfectly happy, William,” said Robert, as they proceeded on their walk.

“Perfectly,” replied William. “I am advanced considerably in the counting-house, and have been promoted to the ledger, and have had my salary increased; so that I now cost father nothing.”

Robert felt a little pricked with this, and could not help ejaculating, he wished he could say as much.

“O! you will in time, I dare say,” continued William; “but at present, you know, you are

educating for the gentleman of the family. I hope it will not be like uncle George."

Robert's pulse began to beat quick, with the thought of what he might come to, and William's with joy at what he had already achieved. In fact, this good William reminds us of John Tipp, so graphically described by Charles Lamb, in the Sketch of the South Sea House, formerly mentioned: "He neither pretended to high blood, nor cared one fig about the matter. He thought an accountant the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest of accountants."

Well," added William, "I have now got six juniors under me, and my masters are so pleased, and so kind!"

"Your masters!" cried Robert. "For God's sake, are you a servant then?"

"I must obey orders," replied William, "and do the work assigned me; and so, I suppose, did you, when you were apprenticed to that lawyer."

"Apprenticed!" cried Robert, with emphasis; "and yet, I wish I had been so; I should not then, perhaps, be what I am now."

"Why, you are now training to be an ambassador, as they say," proceeded William; "and I suppose on your way to that great lord who has promised to make your fortune."

William said this with such simplicity, that

Robert's bile, which had begun to overflow, evaporated in a fit of laughter.

"I wish, my dear brother," said he, "I was as ignorant and as happy as you."

"I don't see," returned William, with all the phlegm of the Dutchman he had become, "why you should call me ignorant; and as to being happy, I thought you were always a favourite among those lords and ladies. So mother said; but I suppose it is as people think."

"I suppose so too," said Robert; and he gave a deep sigh.

"Well, I don't think you are happy, after all," continued William. "But cheer up—there is to be a noble party to dinner to-day at our chief's."

"Merchants, I suppose," said Robert.

"Merchants! Yes! and who better? But there are also to be several noblemen, and our English ambassador at their head; and I hope that will satisfy you."

"I had hoped," returned Robert, "never to have seen an English ambassador again;" and he sighed still more.

William could make nothing at all out of this; but wondered that his brother, who had had all his wishes granted, could possibly be otherwise than happy. What a contrast between the brothers!

The dinner came, and was splendid, sumptuous, and even extravagant. All the quarters of the world had been ransacked for the supply of every thing, in and out of season. A side-board of massive plate—servants without number. It was an immense show, periodically given by this great house, to prove that Dutch merchants were little less than princes. In short, it rivalled all that Robert had seen at Langston or Derwent Castles, or lately, at the hotel of Lord Avington himself.

In the company there were several Dutch noblemen and their ladies, and, as William had promised, Sir Joseph —, the British ambassador. In point of rank, therefore, there was quite sufficient to conciliate Robert's utmost craving of fastidiousness. Still there was something wanting—he scarcely knew what. There was not that ease and smoothness, that quiet dignity, which had belonged to the other parties which had so enchanted him. There was great display, but little repose. All was bustle, as if not in the usual routine. The three partners were at different parts of the table, carefully, painfully, and sometimes teasingly on the watch to see that every one was served, and served to his fill. There was too much bustle about the ambassador—a tall soldier of quality, decorated with the Order of the Bath, which in Robert's

mind, challenged a great deal too much notice from many of the guests, particularly the commercial ones.

Then, again, the ladies were not what he had looked for ; what he had wished ; what he had seen. There was much finery of dress ; silk and diamonds ; much ceremony of manner, bows and compliments ; but no ease. All was a lesson got by heart, and anxiety lest it should fail. There was beauty too, but beauty under constraint. In short, there was none of that charm of self-possession, that proof of their being in their natural element, which formed the distinguishing feature of those high parties which, with all their faults, had so won upon his taste and delighted his mind. For, even among the Ladies St. Maurice, though he had had much to disgust him, much to complain of, there was an ease and independence in their nonchalance, which showed natural freedom from constraint, and a polish not to be suddenly acquired.

Nor was the conversation particularly gratifying, either to his classical or his fashionable requisitions. The ambassador, though of the highest of the court families of England, and bred in camps, as well as diplomacy, was, whether from the last circumstance or from nature, taciturnity itself, and seemed pleased that the chief topics of discourse turned upon trade, in

order that he might be a listener rather than a speaker. Most of the Dutch guests, not merchants, were jurisconsults, or magistrates, who were busied with their *gravamina*, which Robert did not understand a word of; so that the only moment of interest which was afforded him by this grand entertainment was, when the ambassador, hearing that he was or had been attached to Lord Avington's embassy, asked him some questions relative to that mission.

Upon the whole, though the magnificence he witnessed made him think that to be rich must be an extremely pleasant thing, yet to be a rich merchant, even at Amsterdam, did not satisfy the taste for more fashionable society which had made, and thus continued to make, such cruel inroads upon his notions of happiness.

The result was, that if ever, in his resolutions of reform, he had suffered the idea of betaking himself to his original destination, commerce, to enter his mind,—having now seen it under its best aspect, it was for ever abandoned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HE TAKES REFUGE WITH AN AUNT.—THE
DELIGHTFUL CHARACTER OF THAT WOMAN.
—HER HUSBAND, HOUSE, AND OCCUPATIONS.

“ Women are soft, mild, dutiful, and flexible.”

Henry VI., Pt. iii.

A SERIOUS dilemma now awaited him at home, for he returned with feelings very like those of the prodigal son. He had written to his father, acquainting him with all his causes for disgust at Lord Avington's, and his resolution to resign: which had the effect that might be expected upon the prudent and rather irascible Sir Robert.

“ The fellow will drive me mad, and ruin me into the bargain!” said he, brandishing the letter, as he stalked up and down the parlour in Bloomsbury Square. “ Nothing is good enough for him. He refused first to be a merchant; then to be a tutor, with four hundred a-year; then to be a lawyer, whence he might have been a judge; and all because folks were not fine enough for him.

And now, when he has got among those he likes, and has cost me a mint of money to get there, he wo'n't stay. Is this to be borne, Lady Sterling?"

Sir Robert said this to his wife, who was pleading for her son, though herself sorrowful and displeased at his renouncing his appointment—for reasons, indeed, but which she could not appreciate. Alarmed, however, at the serious rage of her husband, who declared he would withdraw all future assistance from so helpless and perverse a creature, and let him shift for himself, she set about soothing him in the best way she could, and at last succeeded, but upon conditions.

"The fellow must part with his nonsense," said Sir Robert; "I am determined upon it. He shall have no more to do with lords;—he must get his own bread, or I shall soon have none to eat myself." (*Mem.* Sir Robert was at that moment thinking of sixty thousand pounds which he had in the funds.) "He shall go back to Oxford—the only thing he is fit for, and bad enough; or he shall go to his aunt Maxfield's, and see if she isn't as good as 'ere a countess he knows."

This aunt Maxfield was rather a favourite with Robert—the only one of his numerous kindred who was so. But this was for reasons which might have made her a favourite with all

the world. She had an excellent heart ; a temper which nothing could ruffle; and so far a wise head, that she envied nobody, and was perfectly content with her situation. She had not a notion that there was such a thing in the world as rivalry or ambition, leading to unhappiness. She never concealed a thought or a motive, and always spoke strict truth, and believed that others did so too—rather from not knowing that falsehood existed, than from reflection upon its impropriety.

She was indeed

“ A gem of purest ray serene,”

and, like those fancied by the poet, was buried in

“ The dark unfathomed caves of ocean ;”

for she lived at Mile End Green, and such both Robert and uncle George thought Mile End Green to be.

From all this it was plain that she knew little of the world ; and, indeed, she was of a vast simplicity. Her plainness, however, added to an undeviating benevolence, made her the delight of her friends, and the idol of her husband and children.

Perhaps aunt Maxfield was the happiest of human creatures. But will this be believed by the Sterlings of the day, when I add, that her husband was a stockbroker, and went every day through Whitechapel to the Stock Exchange !

From childhood she had always distinguished Robert with fondness, and many were the half-crowns she had given him, and the pound cakes she had made for him, till he grew too big for such indulgences. She was fond of his sprightliness and his talents, and prophesied great things of his career ; nor, as he repaid her affections always with sincere attentions (though she lived at Mile End), would she believe half the stories of his passion for finery and great people. She could not fancy that he would ever be like her brother, uncle George, who, as she scarce ever stirred from her neighbourhood, made the distance of it an excuse for cutting her entirely. He might however, have gone farther and fared worse.

Aunt Maxfield and her natural-minded and natural-mannered husband lived in a comfortable, substantial, and roomy house. It stood by the side of a dry gravel-walk, overshadowed by old elms ; was light and cheerful ; had a garden ; and was surrounded by the houses of neighbours, who gave them all their respect. In short, as Robert often thought (though he always repressed the thought), they exhibited in themselves and their dwelling as much happiness as they could have done in Park Lane itself.

Such was the banishment to which Sir Robert, in his irate mood, had condemned his son. We may judge that son's surprise, when, on his arri-

val, he was acquainted with this determination. His father, who, as we have said, was often despotic, even with my lady (though, as John Moody said of Sir Francis, "he cou'd na haud it,") was inexorable to all intreaty.

In vain the mortified diplomat requested to be sent to Lavender Hill. Sir Robert was stern in his refusal.

"No!" said he; "you will then be too much exposed to the fine people of Richmond and Wimbledon. You shall go where you may get wholesome lessons, and see whether a stockbroker and his wife ar'n't as good as an ambassador. I have settled it all with them. They will receive you and your books, and you may walk to the city by way of exercise, if you please, but not to this end of the town, until you are wiser, and have learned to be happy at the other."

Robert was now three-and-twenty, had been in an honourable employ, and had a reputation at Oxford, where he had taken a high degree. We may suppose therefrom he did not like to submit to such peremptoriness. But, as he loved his father, and knew that, however towering his passion sometimes was, it could be mitigated by submission, and he read as much in his mother's eyes; as he also loved his aunt, and moreover had no pecuniary resources of his own; and last, and not least, as he was actually under a fit of disgust

at all the grandees of the world, so that he had begun to turn philosopher about it ; for all these reasons, he unhesitatingly, and not ungracefully, submitted.

“ Possibly,” thought he, “ I may find my father is right ; and that an honest and sensible stockbroker, and his single-hearted wife, may be worth twenty titled blockheads and insolent misses of quality.” The tide, we see, was turned ; and Robert, in his new character of a moralist in disgust, was even impatient to go to his (so-called) penitentiary abode, at Mile End Green.

This resignation to his will, all the reasons for which were certainly not penetrated by him, operated kindly with Sir Robert. He now shook his son kindly by the hand—thought he might yet be a good lad—and hoped he might be a happy one. His mother, too, was delighted ; and he was asked to stay dinner, which his father had originally determined should not be. In the evening, his books and trunks, together with himself, were embarked in a hackney coach ; his diplomatic servant he had discharged in Holland ; and thus, in a comparatively reduced condition, and very like an exile, he was conveyed to a dwelling, which once he would have shuddered to think he had ever been born to inhabit.

His uncle and aunt received him with kind-

ness and affection. The reception of the former was mixed with a little something like raillery, at the penance he was about to undergo ; that of the latter was pure, genuine, and full of encouragement. She had often said she was proud of him, and she said so still.

The evening was peculiarly soft and mild. The garden, which was the only thing his aunt piqued herself upon, threw a thousand scents through the open windows ; all seemed serenity without, and kindness within ; and Robert, the disappointed, the mortified, the wayward, retired to an excellent bed and comfortable room, unhaunted by any corroding thoughts of slights and affronts, evident to angry feelings, though not of a nature to be resented, and therefore felt the more. Thus, he was even almost pleased with the change ; and, from being so entirely removed from the scene of his cares, he fell into a sweeter sleep than for many months he had enjoyed.

In the morning, though he arose early, he perceived through his window that his uncle had had the start of him ; for he saw him pacing a broad middle walk in the garden, with a book in one hand, and a weed-cutter in the other. The weeds sometimes employed him, but the book oftener. He was so occupied with the last, that he would sometimes stop to ponder it ; and

at last lifted up his hands and exclaimed, so as to be heard, "Oh, wonderful! divine! majestic Milton!"

"Can a stockbroker enjoy Milton?" said Robert to himself.

But this was not the only thing that engaged him. The garden attached to the house extended backwards to the size of nearly an acre. It was filled with fruit-trees, flowers, and vegetables, tastefully intermixed. The pears had succeeded the almonds in beautiful blossom; there were absolute hedges of roses, and espaliers of apples gave promise of a flourishing treat in the autumn. All this luxuriance was the creation and effect of the taste and vigilant care of the good aunt Maxfield, seconded with greater industry by her husband, because he knew he could not gratify her by any indulgence in so great a degree; and often, on returning from the Stock Exchange, particularly if he had had a successful day, he brought her a new tulip root or carnation in his pocket, which made her doubly happy—from the addition it made to her favourite pleasures, and still more for the additional proof it gave of her husband's regard.

The Tylneys and Mauleverers, the St. Maurices of the world, will laugh at this recital. A stockbroker and his wife presume to be happy! Oh, death to all exclusiveness! But it was even

so ; and if the idea that he could be laughed at by a courtier ever came across Mr. Maxwell, his consolation always was, " Let those laugh that win."

Robert, almost ashamed of being late, although it was not eight o'clock, descended to breakfast, which was served in a small book-room (we cannot call it a library), which looked upon the garden. Here he passed a few minutes in examining what could be the studies of a man who consumed the whole of every day in the purlieus of St. Bartholomew Lane. To his surprise, and also his pleasure, he found many of the best modern, and some ancient classics. A Horace was absolutely thumbed ; Milton studded with pencilled notes ; and there was a Boydell's Shakespeare, which struck him with wonder ! These, and Cook's Voyages, Annual Registers, and several old divines, exhibited proofs of what he had never imagined,—that a stockbroker might have other employment than what he had supposed absorbed him—the problem that two and two make four.

His contemplation, however, was interrupted by his aunt, who gave him her still smooth and even dimpled cheek, beaming with pleasure, though she was above fifty ; and he was not less pleased with the uncommon neatness and precision of her dress : a morning-gown of quaker silk, and

linen white as snow. Her manner, too, was so unaffectedly easy, that she might have passed for a woman of quality, but that a bunch of small keys, hung by a silver stay-hook to her apron-string, for morning use, denoted attention to house affairs. He never thought his aunt looked so amiable, and, for the first time in his life when at Mile End, he forgot where he was.

The entry of Mr. Maxfield from his garden avocation was the signal for breakfast, which was served in china markedly elegant, and was composed of edibles as luxuriously palatable—tea, excellent cream, cold tongue, fresh eggs, and honey from the garden hives. In fact, no difference in comfort or taste could be shown between these and the breakfasts he had partaken with the nobles of Langston or Derwent Castles, or even the fastidious Ladies St. Maurice; while the mild manners and attentions of his aunt, and the hearty, but not vulgar, plainness of his uncle, were by no means put to the blush by any former recollections of those divinities. In short, Robert Sterling (his fit of philosophy still upon him) seemed as if a new light had sprung up in his mind, and he preferred Mile End Green at least to Bloomsbury Square.

They were waited upon at breakfast by a most decent maiden, almost as well dressed as her mistress, who, by her good manner, and

obsequious, yet cheerful observance of tea-kettle wants and toast supplies, amply made up for the horror which Robert at first experienced at her not being a footman. Here also his new philosophy stepped in, and he pronounced it mere ridiculous finery to require a man servant as a necessary for comfort; a woman, by the sort of blandishment which a woman always possesses, was even the best of the two!

But lest this, too, should be imputed as a fault to a stockbroker's *ménage*, a groom, or gardener, or rather man-of-all-work-looking lad, in a brown coat, with blue cuffs and collar, drove up a handsome gig and horse to the door; and the Phillis, who waited at breakfast, announcing that the chaise was ready, uncle Maxfield prepared to depart for the Stock Exchange, and saluting his wife, not at all as if mechanically, and shaking Robert by the hand, hoping to see him again at four o'clock, mounted his vehicle with his liveried lad, who went to bring it back, and he was left alone with his aunt.

There was a primitiveness in all this, to which Robert had not been accustomed, but which was far from displeasing to the new feelings which had begun to possess him. He felt, in fact, the power of natural happiness to disperse the mists with which prejudice and artificial life

had hitherto blinded him ; and he thought his uncle and aunt, with the pure and simple accompaniments of their position, far preferable beings in themselves, and infinitely happier, than the Avingtons he had left, if he did not think they might compete the palm with the worshipped inmates of Langston itself.

“ What is there in a name ? ” said he, as he traversed a trellis-walk in the garden, which shut out the noon-day sun. “ Call this house a castle, and this walk a terrace, though at Mile End, and what are the superiorities which a palace possesses, in the contentment it gives to its inmates—if, indeed, the contentment does not preponderate the other way ? ” So much had the unaffected kindness and simple habits of his uncle and aunt already won upon him.

The rest of the day he dedicated to settling himself comfortably in his new abode. His clothes were soon arranged, and the closet assigned to him as a dressing-room being furnished all over with shelves, they were filled with his books, so as to give it very much the air of an Oxford study. In this he was pleasantly assisted by his aunt and the “ neat-handed Phillis ” who had waited upon them at breakfast.

A little before four his uncle returned, his brown and blue servitor having gone for him in the family equipage before-mentioned, though

in the mean time the said servitor, having doffed his livery, had made great progress in earthing up sundry rows of peas and beans in the garden : fresh room for recollections and comparisons in the memory and mind of our incipient Mile End philosopher.

And now will any body recognize this same Robert under his new appearance ? Not three weeks had elapsed since his heart and mind were all turbulence, love of the great, and mortification, and strife, and resentment, the consequence of that love not having succeeded.

A roast leg of lamb and mint sauce, accompanied with the freshest young peas (the mint and peas the production of Mr. Maxfield's own hands), formed the best dishes of the dinner ; but its truest sauce was the kind looks and natural ease of manner of his hosts. Their conversation, too—though lords and ladies, or ambassadors, operas or court-balls, or the marriage of maids of honour, were not the subjects, though part of it even turned upon the Lord Mayor—was made agreeable by the shrewdness of observation which distinguished Mr. Maxfield, and the placid good sense which belonged to his wife.

Thus passed the first day, and the next, and very many days after that ; varied only by the little plan of life which Robert found it necessary

to lay down for himself, in which he was allowed the fullest liberty by his kind relations.

It was not that he was now banished from his father's roof; on the contrary, he had permission to return at the end of the first week. But there was something in the pretensions and second-hand airs of the greater number of persons who visited his father and mother, which, while it evidently brought higher scenes and parties to his recollection, shocked him in the comparison, and made him melancholy. Their fine carriages and horses; laced footmen with their canes; their own too fine dresses, which rather displayed than concealed their *parvenu* consequence; but, above all, their evidently affected tone in talking of persons of fashion, whether known to them or not—of the news and anecdotes of the Opera, where they seldom, or Mrs. Cornelly's, or the Drawing-room, where they never went;—all these *indices* of upstart riches and vulgar ambition, shocked our new philosopher the more, because, having seen the reality, he knew the better how to detect the counterfeit.

Shall we say that these things turned his eyes inward upon himself, and that he derived no pleasure from the contemplation? Be this as it will, he preferred the despised Mile End and its unpretending owners, to all the graces of Bloomsbury Square. Here at least he was at perfect

ease, by being so totally removed, not only from what had formerly so excited, but from the vulgar imitation of it, which now so shocked him.

Here, too, he was allowed to join or not, as it suited his humour, in any of the little parties or occupations, social or otherwise, which his uncle and aunt engaged in. The very mediocrity of their acquaintance suited him. He could bear, and unbend, with known inferiors, who pretended to nothing which they were not, better by far than with the *soi-disant* great, who aped the real ones, and generally failed.

Most of Mr. Maxfield's friends were, like himself, unassumingly sensible, with plain, but not coarse manners; and though they were all of the City, yet as they were content to be so, and strove after nothing else, Robert's own sense of propriety, in their case, though he had not shown it in his own, made him not only easy in their company, but good company himself.

Once indeed, but only once, his decorum underwent a shock which he could not for a long time get over, and painfully brought home the thought of where he was. This was when a Mr. Bullfinch, a sort of "hail-fellow well-met" neighbour of his uncle, meaning to show him great civility, asked him to come and "foul a plate" with him—which, to his astonishment, he found

was his mode of asking people to dinner. But, with this exception, the manners of his new society gave no umbrage to the refinement he had imbibed elsewhere ; and in his uncle, who was cultivated beyond what his perpetual avocations in business seemed to promise, he often found a participator, though not a rival, in his own mental tastes.

With few drawbacks, therefore, but, on the contrary, with many appliances, he made good use of the opportunities which his father's anger, though now forgotten, had originally created, to give himself wholly up to reflection and study. He passed all his mornings in his closet, more, we fear, occupied with his beloved *literæ humaniores*, and perhaps the thought of her who still possessed him, than any very deep or professional science. History, however, and philosophy, absorbed many of his best hours, and filled his mind usefully to himself though not to the world ; he mastered Italian, and made great advances in German literature, which he had begun abroad, and which afterwards stood him in much stead ; and he owned that, from the total abstraction he now felt from all his former fascinations in regard to high society, he made greater progress both in literature and happiness than ever he could have done at Oxford, exposed, as he had been there, to the mortifications in which his

weakness had involved him. His account of this was as convincing as plain.

“ I had here,” says he, “ no hankering for any thing else, where I had shut out not only the sight but the thought of the world, and had brought home within the walls of my uncle’s garden, and my own book-closet, the whole of my mind’s interests. I had not a wish or a thought beyond them. Here is the whole secret, and, at the same time, the *sine quâ non*, of solitude: not to hanker for any thing not within your reach. With this requisite, a desert may be a Paradise; without it, a palace is Tartarus.”

He was true to his theory. He adopted all the simplicity of life enjoyed by his hosts; he had no temptations from without, and his relaxations from study were confined to helping his estimable aunt in her rational garden pleasures, or taking long and daily walks in the neighbourhood.

These walks were certainly not very pastoral; for the landscapes afforded by Stratford, Bow, and Old Ford, created no pleasure to the eye of taste. But they teemed with riches for a Johnsonian mind; for never was there such an incessant throng of busy population; and, as fashion and nobility, and even the *parvenu* imitation of them, were here totally out of the question, there was no impediment to the complete indulgence of his reflections or inquiries, whatever they might

be. Thus he discovered that happiness is the growth of no particular soil, and belongs exclusively to no condition of life, but that all depends upon individual character. Thus, too, he found that the whistling carter, or busy shop-keeper, had as much, perhaps greater, chance for it than the worshipper of a great man's smile. He was fond therefore of quoting his Horace to himself :

“ Quod petis hic est,

Est Ulubris, animus si te non deficit æquus ;”

which, being interpreted, meaneth that happiness may be enjoyed even at Mile End, if you have only a well-balanced mind. Certain it is, he confessed then, and afterwards, that the months spent in that place, despicable as it had once seemed to him, and still was considered in Grosvenor Square, were, if not the happiest, at least the freest from care, of all his wayward life.

CHAPTER XXV.

OF THE HORRIBLE ADVENTURE WHICH DROVE
HIM FROM HIS RETREAT.

“So to your pleasures,
I am for other than for dancing measures.”
As You Like It.

AFTER all that has been described in the last chapter, it is really irksome, mortifying, and lamentable, to have to record what follows: for, “oh, the heavy change!” and alas! for poor human nature! when through its weakness, although it may mitigate, it cannot root out the poison of a mischievous ruling passion!

When I had got thus far in Sterling’s papers, I had hoped for something really and lastingly bright, and that we should never have to return to gloom and disappointment; but truth must be told.

The long suburban street that extends from Whitechapel to Stratford is divided into rows of various names, and amongst those, the range of buildings called Assembly Row is conspicuous. In this row, too, the tavern, from which it derives

its appellation, challenges every body's attention. It is an ancient building, with floors projecting over one another, every one ornamented with ponderous and most dignified cornices. Under these are to be seen balconies, in which flourish well-smoked evergreens, and sometimes the aloe, in picturesque ugliness. In the midst is reared a broad black board, on which, in golden letters, is to be read, for the information of all the polite neighbourhood, "The George and Vulture Tavern and Mile End Assembly Rooms."

This, in his walks, often caught the attention of our changed Robert ; not so changed, however, but that he smiled with aristocratic contempt, yet mingled with curiosity to know of what sort of company a Mile End Assembly could consist. This he mentioned, as delicately as he could, to his uncle and aunt, one day after dinner.

"It would not suit you," said his aunt, smilingly. "The ladies are too hoydenish, even for me ; and the gentlemen, though very respectable as tradesmen, have little pretensions to fine manners, whatever they may have to punch, and sometimes, though below stairs, to tobacco."

"And yet," observed Mr. Maxfield, ironically, taking up the subject, "why should not we citizens have our hilarities, be they of dancing or smoking, as well as our betters ? The plea-

sure of one evening a month for three-and-six-pence is cheap and rare enough ; but if fine manners are the question, I doubt whether there is not as much finery at the Mile End Assembly as at a court birth-night ball. To be sure, there is no report in the papers, that Mr. Simpkins danced with Miss Tompkins, or that Mr. Jacks capered in a hornpipe ; but if there were, I have no doubt the paragraph would be read with as much avidity, and gratify as many people, as any account of politer revels in the *Morning Post*."

"Have you ever been there yourself, uncle?" asked Sterling.

"I am a subscriber," answered Maxfield, "*pour encourager les autres*, though I seldom go ; yet when I do, I meet two or three friends, get a rubber, and see a great deal of enjoyment—rather vulgar, I confess—but still enjoyment."

"And does my aunt go with you?"

"Once in a way."

This introduction of the subject led to great consequences ; for, partly to comply with his uncle's invitation, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, which, in such an incognito,—he thought he might very safely do,—it was agreed that that day week he should accompany his relations, as a visitor, to the Mile End Assembly, at the George and Vulture, in Whitechapel Road. And

sure never was such an exemplification of what great things may follow from what small causes : the whole cast and complexion of our hero's life was influenced by it.

At eight o'clock on a Monday evening, Mr. and Mrs. Maxfield, attended by their nephew, entered the ball-room of the George and Vulture. It was some fifty feet long, formed by throwing down the partitions of three other rooms, into which it had usually been divided. At the upper end, lighted with tallow candles, was a sort of gallery, filled with a band of musicians, certainly not Weippert's, under which sat Mr Deputy Robson, Mr. Jobson, Mr. Hobson, Mr. Dobson, and their ladies, and sundries of their progeny, from the ages of fifteen to twenty. These instantly made room among them for Mr. and Mrs. Maxfield, who were much respected by them, and who introduced their nephew to them in form.

Robert's heart smote him as the awful ceremony proceeded. For the first time for several months, symptoms of his old malady recurred ; and he looked fearfully up and down the room, to see if any of the companions of his former greatness might not, by some miracle, be witnessing this momentous *débat*. All, however, was safe ; and tea and bread and butter, and a slight proportion of cake, were handed round, previous to the commencement of the " Came-

ronian Rant;" for waltzes or quadrilles had not then, as we know, reached England, much less the George and Vulture.

Finding every thing safe, Robert began to allow his pleasure at seeing people happy to gain the ascendant, though he refused to dance; but while in the act of declaring so much to a Mr. Tibbs, first clerk to a great banker in Cornhill, who acted as Master of the Ceremonies, and was actually pointing out his proposed partner, an extremely tall lady, covered with pink bows; and while he was bowing his refusal with great and earnest politeness; as fate would have it, he heard a titter from behind, which, from thinking he knew the voices, filled him with dismay.

Oh reader, reader! how will you not be affected—how was I myself not affected—to find, that on turning round, he discovered, in too full certainty, that the laugh proceeded from *Mr. and Lady Euphrasia Tylney*.

Tell it not in Gath; but it was no dream! Would that it had been! But that it may not be disbelieved, these were the circumstances of the apparition. Mr. Tylney and Lady Euphrasia had been married about a fortnight; their hymeneal plan was to pass some time on the Continent; and on their way to Harwich, to embark for the Hague, they had intended to sleep that night at Colchester. By some over-

sight of their coachmaker, it was theirs and Robert Sterling's fate that a wheel of their carriage should come off; and, in fact, they were overturned, though without personal damage, exactly opposite the George and Vulture, on this critical night of the Mile End Assembly.

Such an accident to a travelling carriage and four, even without the shrieks of a terrified lady's maid scrambling from under the dickey, would have brought out, as it did, the landlord, the landlady, and all the maids and waiters, permanent or temporary, though it was assembly night. These ran to offer all possible assistance, and, in fact, disentangled the illustrious pair unhurt from the carriage. They were then ushered, lady's-maid, valet, and all, into the only vacant room, or rather a very poor closet (it being *Assembly night*), which the George and Vulture at that time possessed. Here, while a smith was sent for to look at the wheel, they ordered tea, and hearing the sound of fiddles, and many heavy beatings of feet, over-head, the freak took them, seconded by the landlord's panegyric upon the politeness of his assembly, to witness what Tydney called its humours. But, O, too fortunate!—little did they think of the discovery which awaited them, when almost the first thing they saw was Mr. Tibbs, in black satin thirds and paste knee-buckles, proposing the tall lady

in pink bows as a partner to the knight of St. Swithin's!

Tylney's ancient spleen could not resist this; he laughed outright, and in that laugh all Lady Euphrasia's respect for the *bienséances* could not prevent her from joining.

The distress, the conflict of passions which tore Robert Sterling, may be imagined, and his usual ill-fortune attended him; for, as his quondam friends seemed only to laugh with one another, he could not fasten it upon them as an affront, without committing the self-exposing blunder of Scrub—"I'm sure they were talking of me, for they laughed consumedly." But exclusive of this, he could not in any way notice it, without also noticing, and therefore paying his compliments to, his old acquaintance Lady Euphrasia,—whose *faute de mieux*, as well as her alliance with his enemy, instantly came across him, and as instantly appalled him; so that the poor youth, surprised, overwhelmed, and confounded with contending feelings of the most painful kind, knew not how to look, or act, or speak.

To remedy all this, and at the same time avoid the pain of a recognition in such a place, with such a person as Lady Euphrasia, whose husband, too, it would be so awkward to quarrel with, he (most unlike a hero) fairly bolted, and made but one step down stairs into the street.

There he learned, by what was doing to the carriage, what had occasioned the misfortune of this infelicitous *rencontre*, and in moodiness and misery, which can be conceived but not described, walked, or rather ran home. Here, locking himself in his chamber, he passed such a night as few even of the most miserable would envy.

To his uncle and aunt, who knew nothing of Tylneys, or finery, or the woes of mortified ambition, this conduct appeared inexplicable, nor could all their endeavours draw explanation from him the next day. To tell the truth, he was ashamed to own the cause, and disguised it as well as he could even from himself; but not the less did it rankle and dwell in his mind, which was completely upset by it. He brooded over it in secret; lost his cheerfulness; and, as to his new philosophy, it was all dispersed by the return of old prejudices. Far from an asylum against heart-eating cares, he thought Mile End, and its accursed assembly, worse than Erebus, though the abode of anguish. It was at best the cause and the scene of a disgrace he thought indelible; nor could all the soft attentions of his aunt, who saw that he had received a shock, soothe its effects.

As for his uncle, whose plain sense on such an occasion he was afraid to encounter, he

avoided being alone with him, yet gained little by being alone with himself.

“ It was not,” as he says, in one of his notes upon this crisis, “ that my foolish ambition had returned—that I again panted for high society—or that I had lost one tittle of regard or esteem for my kind relations—or even my liking for their pleasant way of life. But a hankering after the world, *in order to show that I was not afraid of it*, had again got hold of me; and hankering after any thing, however small, is always fatal to the happiness of seclusion. Perhaps I deceived myself by these supposed motives; and the disgust I had now conceived at a place which had lately been so pleasant, was in reality owing to the occasion it had given for a triumph over me by the only man I hated, in the only thing in which he could have triumphed. Be that as it may, I now thought my retreat cowardice, and resolved once more to redeem myself.”

In this he was encouraged both by his father and his uncle, and also by his friend Wilson, who often came to see him, and again set before him the almost criminality, at his years, of abandoning all liberal and honest exertion with a view to his own benefit and that of others.

Wilson, by his exertions and steadiness, was already beginning to be noticed at the bar; and

Sterling, without being conscious of it, regarded him with something like envy. What weighed most with him, however, was the assurance which his father gave him, that he neither could nor would support him in idleness ; and that, having other children to provide for at his death, his means would be very slender if he did not add to them himself. His return to law studies, however, which was proposed, was rejected. It was too late, too crabbed, too uncertain ; to which his own heart, still cherishing the image of Melusina and the elysium of Langston, whispered the comparative inelegance of those he would have to live with.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HE ENGAGES IN A NEW PURSUIT.—CHARACTER
OF A GREAT MILITARY PRINCE.

“ I am a soldier ;
A name that in my thoughts becomes me best.”

Henry V.

GREAT as was the dilemma to which our hero was now reduced, he was again almost miraculously relieved from it by Lord Langston. That constant friend, who knew and approved his reason for quitting the embassy, had still thought of him, and kept his eye upon any opportunity that offered to serve him ; and one had now arisen, which at least appeared so advantageous as to cause t s being laid before him.

A great foreign military prince, who had for more than the last quarter of a century filled all Europe with the glory of his name, and carried the reputation of England, whose armies he commanded (particularly at Minden), to a pitch unknown since the days of Marlborough, had intimated, it seems, to Lord Langston, whose

father had been his companion in arms, his want of an enlightened, well-educated, and well-mannered Englishman, who might act as his English secretary, in the important civil employments he held, in addition to the highest military commands.

This instantly brought Sterling to Lord Langston's mind, and he received a commission to propose it to him. In the temper he was in, it may be supposed he did not balance long in accepting it; and he was soon upon the seas to join the great personage to whom he was now to attach his fortunes, and who exercised almost sovereign authority in a widely extended government, where he put all abilities in requisition, leaving no man to sleep upon his post.

Here opened a new and arduous field, worthy of all Robert's ambition, had it been even greater than it was. It combined, indeed, all his petty views of personal pride, and the gratification of his love of elegant society, with important objects of a higher character; for he found that he might be honourably useful to the state.

The field of his exertion was a court, on a small scale indeed, but in which the etiquette of high manners, and the influence and consequence of office, were as powerful as in countries of the very first rank. Sterling was therefore, after all, to become a courtier, and live with courtiers. He

was in daily intercourse with nobles, and commanders, with whom his official situation (the public business of which he performed to his chief's satisfaction) placed him on, at least, a temporary equality. On the other hand, that situation, and the character he acquired in it, gave him admission to all those elegant female *coteries* which had such charms for him, and to which his homely connexions were, on account of the appointment he held, no bar.

What a contrast to Mile End! How vast! how sudden! How impossible to have been foreseen! The fairy metamorphose of Cinderella could scarcely have been more marked!

If ever Sterling was happy, it must have been now.

And in truth he played his part well. His talents, improved by experience, showed themselves, and were approved in the highest quarter. His manners were agreeable to all he had to do with, and he caught additional polish and good-breeding from his well-bred associates. It was known that he had no illustration from birth or high connexion, yet this did not prevent his progress, and he actually often forgot that he was the Knight of St. Swithin's. It is certain that in this new career he met with no Tylneys, or Mauleverers, or Ladies St. Maurice. Still he too often felt (probably from the ill star under which he

was born) that there was something wanting to his perfect content ; and though he felt that he was no more than in his place, he could not always say that his place was not too much for *him*.

Why ? Why is this ? Why is our sweetest cup always to be dashed with an alloy of bitterness, either of our own infusing, or that of fortune ? Here were respect ; observance from without ; good conscience within ; and the approbation of him who, from his own height of character, made his smallest approbation of consequence. On the other hand, there was no "proud man's contumely ;" no affront to patient merit ; no open exclusiveness, whatever might be the internal sentiment.

But ah ! that *internal* sentiment ! Here the St. Swithin consciousness exercised its usual tyranny, and made him dream of evils which either never existed, or, at least, were never unveiled. Jealousy, in short, never abandoned Robert Sterling ; and Robert Sterling, therefore, where he had superiors in rank and power, was never happy.

It would be difficult to say where was now the cause of his uneasiness. Every thing seemed smooth, yet uneasy he was. There was no want of respect from his chief, but there was little soul-springing attachment. Why should there ?

What right had he to it? O! but the prince preferred the military as friends; and secretly despised civilians!

If secretly, how did Robert know it?

But his civilities were never personal; merely official! Robert sometimes dined with him, but only as secretary, not as Mr. Sterling. Well! what was he else but secretary? and if he had remained Mr. Sterling here, would he ever have known the prince?

These ills of sensibility had their usual effect upon his moody heart, upon which they insensibly preyed; nor was the official confidence with which he was treated, and the approbation he received in all matters of business, at all a compensation for what was wanting. He was trusted and *esteemed*, but never seemingly *preferred* as a companion: this was reserved for aides-de-camp of high birth and fashion, and staff officers, who had long been at the prince's side in the field. Yet of this preference, though so natural, he had the waywardness to complain; and thus the old Haman mortification pursued him here also; for his secretaryship availed him nothing, so long as he saw even many Mordecais sitting in the king's gate.

When these uneasy sensations first attacked him, he could not well tell, for he was for many months delighted with his career; and the study

of the illustrious character under whom he served, gave ample employment, and interest of the most pleasing kind, to his love of observation. And well was it repaid on the part of his chief, by the presentation of qualities and public virtues, to which he did full justice, after he had quitted him, and when he had nothing to hope, or even to wish, from his notice or patronage.

For quit him he did, by his own act ; nor ever repented it ; though to have served him to the best of his ability for some years was the pride and gratification of his after-life, when all other service had become insipid.

How this came about, is best told by himself in a letter we shall subjoin ; observing only, that the reasons were at least not so obvious, any more than (in our opinion) cogent, as they were when he so suddenly broke away from the Avingtonian embassy : for no slight had been put upon him, nor was there even the least ill-will shown by any of his official colleagues. The princess and her little court always treated him with the most perfect politeness ; nor can we enter into his feelings, when he said that it was cold and formal, as if she could not forget his origin, or overlook his want of pretension to fashion, while her willing smiles were given either to the old officers who had fought with

her husband, or the young ones of higher connexions who were coming on under his auspices.

The true secret, perhaps, was, in what he himself had discovered, that as a civilian, whatever his merits, he could not vie with the military, in the real favour of a military hero. His pride was, as usual, piqued, and, as usual, it plunged him in mortifying disappointment. After remaining near three years in official confidence, but, as he said, not in companionship, with the prince, he left the only service which gave him present emolument, and promised him future honour. But, lest we should do him injustice, let his letter to Lord Langston speak for itself.

“ My Dear Lord,

“ You will be astonished to hear that I have quitted the prince. I am almost astonished myself at having done so, for I personally loved, as much as I admired him. Nothing can exceed his great, his heroic qualities, his extraordinary penetration, his stupendous abilities, both in cabinet and field; nothing but the simplicity, straightforwardness and honesty of his character. The most able of diplomatists, as well as of generals, his heart never imagined, much less did his tongue utter, the semblance, not merely of untruth, but of the thinnest disguise of his

opinions. This alone would fill one with veneration ; and when we add to this, how greatly our country is obliged to him for the renovation of its honours,—how entirely, in short, it is to him that she owes her present fame, and present station, among the states of the world ; what can we say, but that to him there is in existence *nihil simile aut secundum*.

“ This, you will say, paints a great man, but that nevertheless he may not be an amiable one. Not so ; for nothing can exceed his amenity, his heartiness, I might almost say his jollity of manner, which is altogether as simple and plain, and yet as energetic, as his intellectual character. The one is quite as undisguised as the other. He is, perhaps, almost the only one who never acts ; not only his word, but even his look, is his bond. In the drawing-room, in the cabinet, or in the street ; on foot, or on horseback ; with a prince, or with a beggar ; he is always the same. As he is the ornament and pride, so I should say, he is the truest son of nature. Often and often have I thought so, when I have hung upon his frank and eloquent discourse in private or public, which, whether himself or another was the theme, always seemed to proceed from the bottom of a heart laid open to his hearers.

“ These are my genuine sentiments ; and as I am under any thing but worldly obligation to

him, having served him to the utmost, with no return but what his shoe-black might have legally exacted (his wages), my sincerity and impartiality cannot be questioned.

“Why then quit him? you will say—or is it *his* act, and not *yours*?

“No, no, indeed! for I should have left him long ago, but for his own wish.

“You bid me unravel this.—I will.

“Spite of *his* kindness, and *my* zeal, and, perhaps, unknown to himself, I found I had two great faults not to be got over, and which would for ever prevent my getting on one inch in his favour, beyond what I was in the first moment of our connexion.

“I was neither a soldier, nor of the Hochwohlgeboren.*

“As a civilian, I felt proscribed; since, bred in camps, and his whole intercourse with companions in arms, sharers of his dangers and his glory, if there was a narrowness about him, it was this natural and venial one, that he who sat in what he thought idleness and indulgence at home, could never be equal in any thing, certainly not entitled to the same confidence or rewards, as those who had braved death in the field, and encountered all the evils of war.

* Of high birth.

“ This I could at least understand. But another of his evident, and, to me, still more ungracious prejudices was, that as a man of the first rank himself, and a prince among the sovereigns of Germany, he looked down upon all out of his profession, who were undistinguished by birth. This, then, not being my lot, any more than a military character, it was easy to see that, while my services were used and appreciated (I am willing to own), higher than they deserved, with my personal character there was no congeniality; and that while rules of civility were always fulfilled, no progress could ever be made towards intimacy or esteem.

“ You know how little this suits my feelings, or my views, reasonable or unreasonable; and the history of my departure from his service is told.

“ He was pleased to say he regretted it; and as I felt how sincere he was in character, I was pleased too; but it was the only pleasure he ever caused me; nor can I ever think myself wrong in putting myself somewhat higher than a common servant, who, while his service is used (perhaps valued), is treated as a mere machine, unworthy of other notice than the word of command.

“ I return to obscurity—perhaps to poverty; for I know how this will operate on my father;

but if I return to independence and freedom of thought, I am not to be pitied.

“ Ever, ever, my dear lord, your grateful and affectionate, though perhaps you may think, your impracticable friend,

“ ROBERT STERLING.”

We will pass the impression made by this letter upon his noble friend, who, at first angry, as well he might be, exclaimed, “ there are some persons whom it is impossible to serve !”

But the effect of his conduct on his father was serious indeed ; for he utterly forbade his return home, and telling him he might draw for £200 a-year, which was all he must ever expect from him, left him to seek his own fortune, and gave all his favour to his steady and less sensitive son William.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HE CONTINUES A LOVER, SPITE OF DESPAIR.

"Oh, dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not the art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it."

Hamlet.

STRANGE to say, though his father's displeasure affected Robert Sterling, this reverse of his fortune did not, at the time, seriously afflict him. He felt even rather heroic at having made such a sacrifice to what he chose to think his independence. It must be owned, however, he did not dream of the difficulties which this reverse would oblige him to encounter.

• His first impulse was to return to his uncle and aunt, who would willingly have again granted him an asylum. And here the sweet mildness of woman's character, and her power to soothe and console the evils of life, whether mental or personal, shone out in that amiable aunt, in a manner to touch him for ever. She was quite alive to his imprudence; she blamed—she almost

reproached him ; but, at the same time, she held her arms wide open to his return, which she even courted, with an affection which, she said, could never be interrupted.

Robert felt this to the bottom of his soul ; but as to Mile End he was an altered man. The high scenes he had been engaged in had, in truth, dissipated whatever philosophy he had acquired in the temporary retreat it had afforded him from very factitious and self-created evils. The numbers of really great men and really well-bred women he had been living with, disabled him, more than ever, from the enjoyments of a mere simple life. It was not that he did not love his aunt and respect his uncle quite as much as ever ; but a too powerful diversion had been given to his thoughts. Accustomed to discourse on the interests of Europe, he could not return to anecdotes of the Stock Exchange ; and though the delightful singleness of heart, evinced in every word and look of his aunt, always charmed him, whatever his vein, the vein was now unhappily much altered ; and he would at least have required a great deal of time, before he could be sufficiently estranged from the mental effects of the last three years, to return to calm forgetfulness.

It must be owned, and it goes against us to own it, that there was another strong, though

strange, impediment to such a return. The apparition of Tylney at the Assembly, haunted him like a ghost ; and his sneering laugh, and Lady Euphrasia's astonished look, were still in his ears and eyes whenever he thought of that part of the town. The very name of the George and Vulture was horror, even on the Continent ; how much more, if to be in its close neighbourhood !

All this, we own, as he did himself, redounded little to the credit of Mr. Sterling's strength of mind ; but we are describing a fine, not a strong mind, and must go on.

He made several attempts, through various relations, to appease his father's indignation ; but they all failed. To be sure, his mother and aunt having done so, he could have had little hope of success through uncle George, who was now grown an old and neglected beau, scarcely tolerated, or only out of compassion, at the court where he served, and wholly discarded from the ranks of fashion. But from Wilson he derived some hope.

That faithful and adhering friend had never abandoned him, and, least of all, when he had seemed to have abandoned himself. He was now, too, better able to give him assistance ; for by his excellent, though perhaps not brilliant talents, sound judgment, and undeviating industry, he was making his way rapidly at the bar ;

and his merits were crowned by having obtained the heart of the pretty and sensible Caroline, and the consent of her father to their union.

While this sincerely rejoiced Robert, it also gave him a pang of severe regret, to think of his own position, in comparison with Wilson's.

But this was now of no avail. It was too late. Sir Robert was not to be approached. He had already done too much. He would do no more. He had made his will.

Thus cast off from his home ; without profession, without fortune, and without the comfort of self-approbation, the knight of St. Swithin's seemed very nearly shipwrecked, though the buoyancy of his mind still bore him up.

As his only powerful friend, Lord Langston, had been any thing but pleased with his letter, and he was absolutely afraid of even consulting the Principal, and as there was positively no chance of any amelioration of his lot, except by taking a place as clerk under his brother William, now in partnership with his father, he had nothing left for it but to banish himself forth of the kingdom.

While abroad, particularly in the countries on the Rhine and in Switzerland, he had often been struck with the sight of foot travellers, hale and rubicund young men, who with their knapsacks slung upon their shoulders, a staff, and generally

a book in their hand, which they seemed to devour, traversed the beautiful landscapes, whether of mountain, plain, or river, with an alacrity of spirit and elasticity of foot which denoted any thing but care. Most of these were young students, going to or returning from different universities.

Students or not, he often envied them their liberty, their carelessness, and their evident enjoyment of the books that were their companions. Full of his Avington disgusts, he felt that he could be happy as one of these, and the thought now struck him that he would be so still. He was a disappointed man, but had nobody to blame but himself; and though apparently abandoned by fortune, he still retained health, strength of limb, and a sanguine heart. Why should he not return to the Continent, though with such diminished resources? He loved to examine nature, whether physical or moral; whether in beautiful tracts of country, or the characters of their inhabitants. He had seen the countries before, but rather had rolled through, than studied them. As a pedestrian, though with a very few pounds in his pockets, he had a better chance of understanding both them and the people, than enclosed in a carriage, in the suite of an ambassador or commander-in-chief.

These considerations, and the state of his

purse, determined him; and, with as little baggage as possible, he once more got into a Dover coach,—where, however, notwithstanding his changed situation, he sat (as he always before had done in a stage-coach) with his handkerchief in his hand, ready to cover his face, under pretence of his nose, when any gentleman's carriage or bevy of dandy horsemen passed the windows.

Oh! ill-weaved Ambition! But, no matter; proceed we with him to France.

He had traversed half the kingdom; had been with Sterne and La Fleur at Montreuil, and with Maria at Moulins; nay, had penetrated to the Rhone, before he asked himself whither he was going, and what to do? His answer was, to get rid of himself; but he knew that was in vain, "*Post equitem sedet cura*;" and though he was not on horseback, the moral was the same.

He saw Lyons, however, and hated it; because, with Jaffier of the Venetians, he thought the bulk of the people "money-loving villains." He got to Avignon, that gloomy, but aristocratic city, and wished himself one of that old *noblesse* whom he resembled in nothing but their poverty. But he was now in the neighbourhood of the Vaucluse.

There was but one drawback to his delight in Petrarch—he had first read him in that odious neighbourhood—we need not say of the George

and Vulture ; but the sweetness and the love overcame all bitterness of memory, and he read him again on the borders of the Vaucluse.

Will the world believe that was Sterling still in love ? Spite of all vicissitudes—all disappointments—absence—other attractions—high employments—high-charactered companions—present abandonment—his memory still dwelt, and his heart still lived, upon that charming vision which had met his eyes full six years before in the shape of Melusina Langston.

Heaven help us ! if such things should be for the world at large—for what would then become of it ? But let us not lament it. Constancy in love is certainly not of every day's occurrence ; but when it does occur, it has its advantages. It generates whatever is liberal and refined ; it purifies all that is gross ; it spurns all meanness ; creates a nobleness of sentiment, and equals in his mind a beggar with a prince. The denizens of the world, indeed, whether votaries of ambition, of wealth, or of sensual pleasure, are not able easily to understand the all-absorbing power of a pure love passion, when it has once taken possession of a sensitive mind. They know not of how little worth all other objects, all other things, seem in comparison ; how totally it suffices of itself for all mental, we had almost said, all bodily food ; how entirely it can supply happi-

ness, from mere meditation on the beloved image. Hopelessness itself, as to the future, cannot deprive such a mind of the treasures of the past ; for the heart dwells upon what *has been*, with sometimes even more vivid feeling than upon what *is*. In this, even a despairing lover, penetrated by the recollection of what he has enjoyed, though lost, may be compared to a bereaved parent or husband, whose very agony is often soothed by remembrances, which might, by some, be thought to increase it.

“ Ask the faithful youth,
Why the cold urn of her whom long he lov'd,
So often fills his arms, so often draws
His lonely footsteps at the silent hour,
To pay the mournful tribute of his tears ?
Oh ! he will tell thee, that the wealth of worlds
Should ne'er seduce his bosom to forego
That sacred hour.”

Just so was it with the love of Sterling. He had cherished it as his most pleasing, most consoling inmate, when all hope was lost and withered. Under depression and penury, in solitude and in banishment, it still was his companion, and relieved many a weary day of half its weariness ; and often in a peasant's cottage (so poor that the only warmth arose from the scattered embers of the hearth, and the only light from the flickering of an exhausted lamp), his

thoughts conjured up warmth, and light, and joy, in the visions of Langston Castle, and the ornament of it, which continued so to distress and so delight him.

Thus, degrading as his recollections still were of his St. Swithin's origin, still a martyr to false ambition, and with scarce a sixpence in his pocket, the spirit of our friend rose above his fortune, and swelled his heart with importance, when, on the borders of the Vaucluse, he recollected his own emotions at the sight of Melusina, and compared them with those of Petrarch at the sight of Laura.

Perhaps he had the advantage of the poet, who had only seen his mistress, in transitory vision, passing into church; while he had enjoyed the conversation of his—had danced with her, walked with her, read to her, but, alas ! could, no more than Petrarch, say he was remembered *by* her. On the contrary, his long and uninterrupted exile was without an indication, spite of her brother's friendship, that she ever thought of days the recollection of which to him was Paradise. But his enthusiasm rose to its height in this consecrated spot of his brother enthusiast, particularly when he read the thousand tributes to his love and constancy which overflowed from the pens of visitors to his house at Arqua ; and only substituting in idea Melusina for Laura, in

the manner, as he thought, of his master, he gave vent to his smothered feelings in the following stanzas:—

“ Love flutters round her, full of envious wiles,
Dwells on her cheek, with softest dimples prest;
Plays round her mouth, and lightens it with smiles,
Swims in her eye, and revels on her breast.

Too vent'rous youth, to court the pleasing pain!
To drink such pois'nous draughts of the sweet madness!
Though seen but once, those beauties still remain,
And fill the soul with a soft-thrilling sadness.

Yet, led by thee, sweet Fancy! still I view
Those countless graces, and can still behold
That speaking visage, and those eyes so true,
So true to Nature, in her fairest mould.

Led on by thee, methinks by faëry stream
She sleeps, her friend the balmy slumber guarding;
And when awoke from some delicious dream,
With a soft smile his pleasing care rewarding.

Too powerful Fancy! all your dreams are vain,
I'll heed no more the visions you inspire;
The proud one cares not for my humble strain,
Nor even knows I strike the sounding lyre.”

Other visitors, both poets and lovers, had felt, and told the same sentiments, inspired by the contemplation of the house, history, and conduct of Petrarch, and these they had detailed, with more or less genius, in the inscriptions they had left behind them. But these were not consolatory; for all their lines, like his own, denoted

despair ;—save only one, and that, we fear, only made him more melancholy ; for the happiness it described, as well as the beautiful turn of the thought, he felt he never could reach. He copied it in his notes, and as it seems long after to have greatly impressed him (for he read it to me, at sixty, with all the fervor of five-and-twenty), I cannot help inscribing it, if only for the effect it had upon him :—

“ Mary, when we to Arqua’s village came,
Saw the rear’d tomb, the fountain’s hallowed rill,
And climb’d the summit of that verdant hill,
Where Petrarch’s dwelling bears the poet’s name ;

When I beheld the crowded leaf proclaim,
In varied tongues, the homage of each clime,
Then crown’d with bay, the meed of deathless rhyme,
I sigh’d myself to share the poet’s fame.

Yet ah ! when I remember’d how in vain,
His lyre he strung to soften Laura’s pride ;
Fated thro’ life to tune the mournful strain,
His grief unpitied, and his pray’r denied ;
Ah ! Mary, then thy yielding hand I prest,
Nor sigh’d for *fame*, who was in *love* so blest.”*

* The Editor fears he has been impolitic in placing these very pleasing lines in juxtaposition with those of his hero, Sterling ; for the author of them exceeds him as much in his poetry as in his happiness. We are only withheld from mentioning his name, because we have not permission to do so. It scarcely need be added, that “ Mary ” was his wife.

This occupation of his thoughts, and all the associations of the romantic place he was in, added to his total indifference where to bestow himself, and his perfect liberty to bestow himself where he pleased, kept him several weeks in the neighbourhood of the Vaucluse. Nismes tempted him to pursue antiquities in Italy, where, like another man of genius, and little steadiness, he walked,

“ Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.”

But Sterling was richer than Goldsmith, and sometimes took the aid of a voiturier. He emerged, however, on foot, through the Tyrol into Switzerland, where the republican manners of the people (not at all more simple because republican) disappointed him.

Here he encountered an affront, which angered him more than he liked to confess. A rich dealer in Dutch cheese, in one of the cantons, took a liking to him, and hearing he had been secretary to Prince —, whose reputation was well known, by way of mending the breed, offered him his daughter, with twenty thousand florins for a dowry. This, though the daughter was what is called very passable, was rejected with indignation, and the lady became much happier by espousing a manufacturer of aqua-busade.

I mention this incident, only to show how true Sterling was to his early impressions, both as to Lady Melusina and his aristocratic prejudices. As to the first, too, we must do him the justice to say, that the sacrifice, if it was one, was at least hopeless ; for very soon after his ebullition at the Vaucluse, he heard that she had given herself to a high-born friend of her brother's, the young and accomplished Lord Lovel, with whom she had every prospect of being happy.

To the credit of the purity, at least, of his attachment, this made no difference in Robert's feelings of devotion to her,—which he cherished through all his variety of fortune, to his last hour.

It is not necessary to the task I have undertaken, to pursue our knight through all his no-adventures on the Continent, which, though not unpleasant, had nothing in them uncommon ; unless it be that at Vienna, whither he had wandered, he again met with Lord Langston, whose anger had long been forgotten, and who was in an instant heartily reconciled to him ; perhaps, with increased interest, when he saw how dearly he had paid for his silly prejudices, and how well he had borne his punishment. He would, indeed, have pressed upon him to take refuge with him, and strongly proposed his sharing his house. But this was rather peremp-

torily refused ; and, indeed, the liberty Sterling had now so long enjoyed, in the power of transporting himself whithersoever he pleased, had become so sweet, that I question if any appointment, however advantageous, would have been preferred to it.

His way of life was so independent of others, and even almost of circumstances, as to produce exactly what it did. It made him a humorist. This almost always accompanies solitariness,—and he was solitary ; it belongs to love,—and, though his mistress was married, he was still a lover ; it eminently emanates from disgust,—and he was disgusted. He was not, indeed, a Timon ;—he did not rail at the world ;—at least, not the unfashionable part of it ;—yet he shunned it ; the higher ranks, because, as he said, they looked down upon *him* ; the middling, because he looked down upon *them*. The lower, therefore, were those he chiefly regarded ; and this, by giving him entirely his own way, confirmed all his self-indulgences. He loved a peasant as he loved his dog, because he let him do as he pleased. And hence, he was oftener seen in a cottage, where he would sometimes lodge for weeks, than in the purlieus of palaces, once so interesting to him.

These habits gained upon him, and lasted some years, during which he traversed almost

the whole of Europe ; nor could he entirely throw them off, even after his return to England, to which he was forced by circumstances alone.

His father was now in his last sickness, and, long mollified, sent him his blessing, and wished to see him ; which was strongly urged by Wilson, now his brother-in-law. He instantly complied ; but, to his consternation, arrived too late ; for, though alive, Sir Robert was insensible, and (unfortunately or not may be doubtful) had not the power of altering his will, as he intended. By this it appeared that two thousand pounds, in addition to the two hundred pounds a-year, which had been settled upon him, was the whole of his share of his father's fortune ; while ten thousand pounds were given to his sister, and the whole of his lucrative business, and the residue of the property, to his brother William.

We will not say that he was not disappointed ; for the hope of being restored to his father's favour had never abandoned him. But he bore it with his usual spirit ; and when William and Wilson offered most liberally to increase his legacy, on the ground of his father's known intentions, he utterly refused it.

To eke out his modicum, his brother proposed to manage his two thousand pounds for him in trade, demonstrating to his and Wilson's satisfaction that, almost without risk, he could make

it yield more than twice the interest he could obtain for it elsewhere. But this, too, was refused, and for a reason which, considering his now changed life, is astonishing. He did not doubt the security, and ten or twelve per cent. was as welcome to him as to most ; but, changed as he was, he had not parted with the old leaven. "*Cælum non animum mutant*" seemed to be his motto. In a word, though all chance of fine company was at an end, the thought of being involved in trade continued to be revolting. Rather with somewhat increased means, he would have resumed his knapsack, together with his plan of exploring the Danube, which had been interrupted by his father's death.

While busied with these designs, a prospect opened which totally changed them. His old friend, the Principal, was still in being, and still his friend ; and being so, we must do justice to the real goodness of that extraordinary man, who never abandoned any one he had loved, except for defect in moral conduct. Imprudences, even such as Robert's, he could reprehend, but also forgive ; and having learned from himself that his only reason for having shunned him for the last few years, had been from a sense of shame ; and seeing, as he said, how absolutely he was thrown away ; he endeavoured once more to interpose and improve his condition.

Robert's scholarship was known and undoubted, and his muse had never been abandoned, when his waywardness had made him abandon every thing else. There was a contest for a lay-fellowship at Oxford impending, which would give to the successful candidate honour and comparative comfort. Something depended upon interest; much upon a successful examination. Robert was a bachelor of arts, and still a member of the university; he was therefore eligible, and it was the Principal's proposal that he should stand. He added an offer of his house, books, interest, and all personal assistance, during the contest.

For once, Robert, as he said himself, was not a fool. He became possessed of a genuine ambition for a really worthy object. He accepted the offer. He was in his element. He called up all his powers; and what with his own energies, and the exertion of the Principal's extensive influence, he succeeded.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

“One that knows the law, go to;—and a rich fellow enough, go to;—and a fellow that hath had losses;—and one that hath two gowns, and every thing handsome about him.”—*Much Ado about Nothing*.

BEHOLD now our would-be man of fashion, intended merchant and barrister, embryo diplomatist and statesman, and Continental traveller, brought at last into port, as a real Fellow of a College!

And we are glad to say that, whether from having experienced so many disappointments, or being now above thirty, he began to see the world in a truer light;—or, being deprived by the death of his father of all hope of fortune, he found it necessary to trifle no longer with his well-being;—he settled himself down in his new capacity, with a content to which he had hitherto been a stranger.

Nor ought we to be surprised. Of all other

positions, except that, perhaps, of being in a station to pretend to, and gain, the object of this early love, "for whose dear sake, they say, he did now abjure the sight and company of women," none probably could have suited him so well. No longer a freshman, aiming at things which he could not obtain,—laughed at for his rawness, and deservedly thwarted in his ill-directed ambition,—he was now enrolled among the dignitaries, as it were, of the place. He was a man of authority, and, as his designation implied, consorted with the superiors of the college. This, and his scholastic reputation, procured him the notice, nay, the court, of all persons of eminence, whether for place, power, or birth, in the University. Nor were his original propensities without gratification, to find that even the Tylneys of the then day gave him voluntarily that respect and deference which he had in vain endeavoured to extort from those of a former time. And thus the remark of the sagacious Principal was confirmed, that the original sin of a private education, and a want of birth and station, might be balanced in a university, by literary merit and academical distinction.

Fortune, therefore, now seemed to smile upon our knight, and he at last had sense enough to discover why. He had quitted all the strivings

and swellings of the frog, which with such uncomfortable appositeness had been formerly alluded to by his then young friend, Wilson. He had found, and knew his place; nor was it an unpleasant one. His literary tastes were not only consulted, but gratified: nay, they added to his consequence. The finest libraries in Europe were open to him, and good use did he make of them, for every day saw him at the Bodleian. The most scientific lectures added to his stores—the most elegant relaxations, particularly music, to his pleasures. Every thing was personally respectable, and delightfully as well as academically aristocratic. The walks and learned groves; the banquet halls (worthy of palaces); the common room, for social intercourse; the retired chamber, for private study; liberal public disquisition, and secluded philosophical meditation;—these are the real and attainable enjoyments of a Fellow of a College, *if he pleases*: and *si sua bona norint*; and these Robert Sterling did not now throw away.

Still his old passion did not altogether take leave of him. His favourite companions, provided they were equally gifted with others, were always among the aristocracy; and we fear the influence of gold tufts and velvet caps, if also accompanied by genius and talent, had still a hidden charm for him, not possessed by stuff

gowns. It is certain that by many of his more homely colleagues he was still reckoned "fine," notwithstanding his experience of the deceptions of finery.

To one proof of old prejudices he very frankly owns. Having taken his degree in civil law, and assumed the civilian's *silk* gown, he felt rather more on a level with those who were entitled to it from the rank in which they were entered. But being a civilian, many of his friends pointed out to him the impolicy of confining his sphere to Oxford, when the great university of the world lay open to him in London.

They showed him illustrious examples of great academical characters, who had become greater still by transferring themselves to the civil law courts as practitioners. Fame, fortune, power, and the peerage itself, were all open to him: nor, though late, was it yet *too* late.

Had these representations produced no effect—had he bounded his ambition by what he now possessed—the calm enjoyments of literary research,

"Atque inter sylvas academi quærere verum,"

we should not have been surprised.

But, will it be believed? he listened to these suggestions, and entertained golden dreams upon them; yet waked from them in horror, because

he found he should have to pass the greater part of his life in the vicinity of St. Paul's.

This was the last act of his folly. For having now made up his mind to his present fortune,—meagre, though not unpleasant,—and determined to confine himself to the *sylvas academi*, where he had few competitors in any thing—he beguiled his life for very many years in a sort of learned leisure, or rather slumber, into the utility of which to others, or even to himself, he was afraid to inquire.

The death of the excellent Principal bereaved him of one of the greatest supports of his consequence. He became more and more abstracted,—was less and less known,—and, from growing inaction, ceased even to desire to replace the friends he had lost by new ones. Lord Langston was the only man of consequence who remained to him, and with those of no consequence he had no ambition to be united. With him who, from peculiar circumstances, had remained all his life a single man, he maintained correspondence and intercourse, the only interest he had left in the world; and, at last, Oxford itself, from his total abandonment of its business, and the objects it held out, became so changed and vacant, that, from sheer necessity, to get rid of the tedium of life, at Lord Langston's suggestion he removed to town.

Here, with his slender funds, and the help of such allurements as a club such as I have described can exhibit, to a man thrown away and wholly without pursuit, he contrived to

“Wear out his age with shapeless idleness.”

I speak in the past time; for soon after I had put the bulk of these facts together, by one of those sudden turns of fate which so often surprise us, though apparently in health, I was deprived of him.

“No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode;
There they alike in trembling hope repose,
The bosom of his father and his God.”

READER.

If you want a moral to this long story,—follow your place, wherever it may lead you,—but never go beyond it. If you do the first, you will, like a healthy plant in its natural soil, flourish, luxuriate, and live:—if the last, like a forced exotic, you will sicken, languish, and die.

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